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OUIDA

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'Like unto moths fretting a garment' (PSALM)

IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. II.

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1880

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251. f. 618.

LONDON : PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

MOTHS.

CHAPTER XII.

AGAIN in the month of November, exactly one year after her marriage, a tall slender figure clothed in white, with white furs, moved to and fro very wearily under the palms of the Villa Nelaguine on the Gulf of Villafranca, and her sister-in-law, looking wistfully at her, thought:

'I hope he is not cruel—I hope not. Perhaps it is only the death of the child that has saddened her.'

Vere read her thoughts and looked her in the eyes.

'I am glad that the child died,' she said simply.

The Princess Nelaguine shuddered a little.

'Oh, my dear,' she murmured, 'that cannot be. Do not say that; women find solace in their children when they are unhappy in all else. You have a tender fond heart, you would have ——'

'I think my heart is a stone,' said the girl in a low voice; then she added: 'In the poem of "Aurora Leigh" the woman loves the child that is born of her ruin; I am not like that. Perhaps I am wicked; can you understand?'

'Yes, yes; I understand,' said the Princess Nelaguine hurriedly, and, though she was accounted in her generation a false and heartless little woman of the world, her eyes became dim and her hands pressed Vere's with a genuine pity. Long, long years before Nadine Zouroff had herself been given to a loveless marriage, when all her life seemed to her to be lying dead in a soldier's unmarked grave in the mountains of Caucasus.

'That feeling will change, though, be

assured,' she said soothingly. 'When we are very young all our sorrow is despair; but it does not kill us, and we live to be consoled. Once I felt like you—yes—but now I have many interests, many ties, many occupations, and my sons and daughters are dear to me, though they were not *his;* so will be yours, to you, in time.'

Vere shuddered.

'People are different,' she said simply; 'to me it will always be the same.'

She pulled a cluster of white roses, and ruffled them in her hands, and threw them down, almost cruelly.

'Will those roses bloom again?' she said. 'What I did to them your brother has done to me. It cannot be altered now. Forget that I have said anything; I will not again.'

One year had gone by since Vere had been given, with the blessing of her mother and the benison of society, to the Minotaur of a loveless marriage. To herself she seemed so utterly changed that nothing of her old self was left in her, body or soul. To the world

she only seemed to have grown lovelier, as was natural with maturer womanhood, and to have become a great lady in lieu of a graceful child.

She was little more than seventeen now, but, herself, she felt as if centuries had rolled over her head.

After her winter at the Imperial Court, she had been so changed that she would at times wonder if she had ever been the glad and thoughtful child who had watched the North Sea break itself in foam in the red twilight of Northumbrian dawns.

She had a horror of herself.

She had a horror of the world.

But from the world and from herself there was now no escape.

She was the Princess Zouroff.

An immense disgust possessed her, and pervaded all her life; falling on her as the thick grey fog falls on a sunny landscape—heavy, dull, and nauseous.

The loveliest and youngest beauty in the Salle des Palmiers, with the stars of her diamonds shining on her like the planets of a

summer night, she was the saddest of all earthly creatures.

The girl who had gone to bed with the sun and risen with it; who had spent her tranquil days in study and open-air exercise; who had thought it pleasure enough to find the first primrose, and triumph enough to write the three letters at the foot of a hard problem; who had gone by her grandmother's side to the old dusky church, where noble and simple had knelt together for a thousand years, and who had known no more of the evil and lasciviousness of the world at large than the white ox-eye opening under the oak glades; the girl who had been Vere Herbert on those dark chill Northumbrian shores was now the Princess Vera, and was for ever in the glare, the unrest, the fever, and the splendour, of a great society.

Night was turned into day; pleasure, as the world construed it, filled each hour; life became a spectacle; and she, as a part of the spectacle, was ceaselessly adorned, arrayed, flattered, censured, and posed—as a model is posed for the painter. All around her was

grand, gorgeous, restless, and insincere; there was no leisure, though there was endless ennui; and no time for reflection, though there were monotony and a satiety of sensation. Sin she heard of for the first time, and it was smiled at; vice became bare to her, but no one shunned it; the rapacity of an ignoble passion let loose and called 'marriage' tore down all her childish ignorance and threw it to the winds, destroyed her self-respect and laughed at her, trampled on all her modest shame, and ridiculed her innocence.

In early autumn she had given birth to a son, who had lived a few hours, and then died. She had not sorrowed for its loss—it was the child of Sergius Zouroff. She thought it better dead. She had felt a strange emotion as she had looked on its little body, lying lifeless; but it was neither maternal love nor maternal regret; it was rather remorse.

She had been then at Svir, on the shores of the Baltic, one of the chief estates of the Princes of Zouroff, which all the summer long had been the scene of festivities, barbaric in

their pomp and costliness; festivities with which her husband strove to wile away the year which Imperial command had bade him pass, after marriage, on his hereditary lands.

'Do not allow my mother to come to me!' she had said once with a passionate cry when the birth of the child had drawn near. It was the first time she had ever appealed in any way to her husband. He laughed a little grimly, and his face flushed.

'Your mother shall not come,' he said hastily. 'Do you suppose she would wish to be shut up in a sick room? Perhaps she might, though, it is true; miladi always remembers what will look well. One must do her the justice to say she always remembers that, at least. But no; she shall not come.'

So it came to pass that her mother in her little octagon boudoir in Chesham Place, lined with old fans of the Beau Siècle, and draped with Spanish lace, could only weep a little with her bosom friends, and murmur, 'My sweet child!—such a trial!—in this horrible weather by the Baltic—so cruel of the Emperor—and to think my health will not let me go to her!'

Zouroff, who passionately desired a legitimate son, because he hated with a deadly hatred his next brother Vladimir, took the loss of the male child to heart with a bitterness which was only wounded pride and baffled enmity, but looked like tenderness beside the marble-like coldness, and passive indifference of his wife.

Physicians, who always are too clever not to have a thousand reasons for everything, alleged that the change of climate and temperature had affected the health of the Princess Vera; and her husband, who hated Russia with all his might, urged this plea of her health to obtain a reduction of the time he had been ordered to remain on his own lands; and obtaining what he wished from the Tsar, returned in November to the French Riviera.

He had purchased the villa of his sister from her, although it was called still the Villa Nelaguine. He had bought it in a mood of captious irritation with his wife, knowing that to Vere, reared in the cold, grey days and under the cloudy skies, and by the sombre seas of the

dark north, the southern seaboard was oppressive in its languor and its light. Sometimes he liked to hurt her in any way he could; if her child had lived he would have made it into a whip of scorpions for her. Yet he always lavished on her so much money, and so many jewels, and kept her so perpetually in the front of the greatest of great worlds, that everybody who knew him said that he made a good husband after all; much better than anyone would have anticipated.

He intended to stay at the villa on the Mediterranean for three months, and thither came, self-invited because she was so near—only at Paris—the Lady Dolly.

Neither Zouroff nor his sister ever invited her to their houses, but pretty Lady Dolly was not a woman to be deterred by so mere a trifle as that.

'I pine to see my sweet treasure!' she wrote; and Sergius Zouroff, knitting his heavy brows, said 'Let her come,' and Vere said nothing.

'What an actress was lost in your mother,'

he added with his rough laugh; but he confused the talent of the comedian of society with that of the comedian of the stage, and they are very dissimilar. The latter almost always forgets herself in her part; the former never.

So one fine, sunlit, balmy day towards Christmas, Lady Dolly drove up through the myrtle wood that led to the Villa Nelaguine.

It was noonday. The house guests were straying down from upstairs to breakfast in the pretty Pompeiian room, with its inlaid marble walls, and its fountains, and its sculpture, and its banks of hothouse flowers, which opened on to the white terrace, that fronted the rippling blue sea. On this terrace Zouroff was standing.

He saw the carriage approaching in the distance through the myrtles.

'*C'est madame mère*,' he said, turning on his heel, and looking into the breakfast chamber. He laughed a little grimly as he said it.

Vere was conversing with Madame Nelaguine, who saw a strange look come into her eyes; aversion, repugnance, contempt, pain,

and shame all commingled. 'What is there that I do not know?' thought the Princess Nadine. She remembered how Vera had not returned her mother's embrace at the marriage ceremony.

Sergius Zouroff was still watching the carriage's approach, with that hard smile upon his face which had all the brutality and cynicism of his temper in it, and under which delicate women and courageous men had often winced as under the lash.

'*C'est madame mère,*' he said again, with a spray of gardenia between his teeth; and then, being a grand gentleman sometimes, when the eyes of society were on him, though sometimes being rough as a boor, he straightened his loose heavy figure, put the gardenia in his button-hole, and went down the steps, with the dignity of Louis Quatorze going to meet a Queen of Spain, and received his guest as she alighted with punctilious politeness and an exquisite courtesy.

Lady Dolly ascended the steps on his arm.

She was dressed perfectly for the occasion; all

a soft dove-hue, with soft dove-coloured feather trimmings, and silvery furs with a knot of black here and there to heighten the chastened effect, and show her grief for the child that had breathed but an hour. On her belt hung many articles, but chief among them was a small silver-bound prayer-book, and she had a large silver cross at her throat.

'She will finish with religion,' thought Zouroff; 'they always take it last.'

Lady Dolly was seldom startled, and seldom nervous; but, as her daughter came forward on to the terrace to meet her, she was both startled and nervous.

Vera was in a white morning dress with a white mantilla of old Spanish lace about her head and throat; she moved with serene and rather languid grace; her form had developed into the richness of womanhood; her face was very cold. Her mother could see nothing left in this wonderfully beautiful and stately person of the child of eighteen months before.

'Is that Vere?' she cried involuntarily, as she looked upward to the terrace above.

'That is Vera,' said Sergius Zouroff drily. All the difference lay there.

Then Lady Dolly recovered herself.

'My sweet child! Ah the sorrow!—the joy!' murmured Lady Dolly, meeting her with flying feet and outstretched arms, upon the white and black chequers of the marble terrace.

Vere stood passive, and let her cold cheeks be brushed by those softly-tinted lips. Her eyes met her mother's once, and Lady Dolly trembled.

'Oh this terrible *bise*!' she cried, with a shiver; 'you can have nothing worse in Russia! Ah, my dear, precious Vera! I was so shocked, so grieved!—to think that poor little angel was lost to us!'

'We will not speak of that,' said Vere in a low voice, that was very cold and weary. 'You are standing in the worst of the wind; will you not come into the house? Yes; I think one feels the cold more here than in Russia. People say so.'

'Yes; because one has sunshades here, and one sees those ridiculous palms, and it ought

to be warm if it isn't,' answered Lady Dolly; but her laugh was nervous and her lips trembled and contracted as she thus met her daughter once more.

'She is so unnatural!' she sighed to Princess Nelaguine; 'so unnatural! Not a word, even to *me*, of her poor dear little dead child. Not a word! It is really too painful.'

The Princess Nelaguine answered drily: 'Your daughter is not very happy. My brother is not an angel. But then, you knew very well, *chère madame*, that he never was one.'

'I am sure he seems very good,' said Lady Dolly piteously, and with fretfulness. She honestly thought it.

Vere had enormous jewels, constant amusement, and a bottomless purse; the mind of Lady Dolly was honestly impotent to conceive any state of existence more enviable than this.

'To think what I am content with!' she thought to herself; she who had to worry her husband every time she wanted a cheque; who

had more debts for dress and pretty trifles than she would pay if she lived to be a hundred; and who constantly had to borrow half-a-crown for a cup of tea at Hurlingham, or a rouleau of gold to play with at Monaco.

Those were trials indeed!

'I hope you realise that you are my mother-in-law,' said Zouroff, as Lady Dolly sat on his right hand, and he gave her some grapes at breakfast.

He laughed as he said it. Lady Dolly tried to laugh, but did not succeed.

'You are bound to detest me,' she said with an exaggerated little smile, 'by all precedents of fiction and of fact.'

'Oh no!' said Zouroff gallantly; 'never in fiction or in fact had any man so bewitching and youthful a mother-in-law. On my life, you look no older than Vera.'

'Oh-h!' said Lady Dolly, pleased but deprecatory. 'Vera is in a grand style, you know. Women like her look older than they are at twenty, but at forty they look much younger than they are. That is the

use of height and straight features, and Greek brows. When one is a little doll, like me, one must be resigned to looking insignificant always.

'Is the Venus de Medici insignificant? she is very small,' said Zouroff still most gallantly; and he added, in a lower key, 'You were always pretty, Dolly; you always will be. I am sorry to see that prayer-book; it looks as if you felt growing old, and you will be wretched if you once get that idea into your head.'

'I *feel* young,' said Lady Dolly sentimentally. 'But it would sound ridiculous to pretend to be so.'

Her glance went to the graceful and dignified presence of her daughter.

'Vere is very handsome, very beautiful,' she continued hesitatingly. 'But—but—surely she is not looking very well?'

'She is scarcely recovered,' said Zouroff roughly, and the speech annoyed him. He knew that his young wife was unhappy, but he did not choose for anyone to pity her,

and for her mother, of all people, to do so!——

'Ah! to be sure, no!' sighed Lady Dolly. 'It was so sad—poor little angel! But did Vera care much? I think not.'

'I think there is nothing she cares for,' said Zouroff savagely. 'Who could tell *your* daughter would be a piece of ice, a *femme de marbre*? It is too droll.'

'Pray do not call me Dolly,' she murmured piteously. 'People will hear.'

'Very well, *madame mère*!' said Zouroff, and he laughed this time aloud.

She was frightened—half at her own work, half at the change wrought in Vere.

'Who could tell she would alter so soon,' she thought, in wonder at the cold and proud woman who looked like a statue and moved like a goddess.

'To think she is only seventeen!' said Lady Dolly aloud, in bewilderment.

'To be married to me is a liberal education,' said her son-in-law, with his short sardonic laugh.

'I am sure you are very kind to her,' murmured poor little Lady Dolly, yet feeling herself turn pale under her false bloom. 'The beast!' she said to herself with a shudder. 'The Centaurs must have been just like him.'

She meant the Satyrs.

'Sergius,' said Princess Nelaguine to her brother that night, 'Vera does not look well.'

'No?' he answered carelessly. 'She is always too pale. I tell her always to rouge. If she do not rouge in Paris, she will scarcely tell in a ball, handsome though she is.'

'Rouge at seventeen! You cannot be serious. She only wants to be—happy. I do not think you make her so. Do you try?'

He stared and yawned.

'It is not my *métier* to make women happy. They can be so if they like. I do not prevent them. She has ten thousand francs a month by her settlements to spend on her caprices—if it is not enough she can have more. You may tell her so. I never refuse money.'

'You speak like a *bourgeois*,' said his sister, with some contempt. 'Do you think that

money is everything? It is nothing to a girl like that. She gives it all to the poor; it is no pleasure to her.'

'Then she is very unlike her mother,' said the Prince Zouroff with a smile.

'She is unlike her, indeed! you should be thankful to think how entirely unlike. Your honour will be safe with her as long as she lives; but to be happy—she will want more than you give her at present, but the want is not one that money will supply.'

'She has been complaining?' said her brother, with a sudden frown.

Madame Nelaguine added with a ready lie: 'Not a word; not a syllable. But one has eyes—and I do so wish you to be kind to her.'

'Kind to her?' he repeated, with some surprise. 'I am not unkind that I know of; she has impossible ideas; they make me impatient. She must take me and the world as she finds us; but I am certainly not unkind. One does not treat one's wife like a saint. Perhaps you can make her comprehend that. Were

she sensible, like others, she would be happy like them.'

He laughed, and rose and drank some absinthe.

His sister sighed and set her teeth angrily on the cigarette that she was smoking.

'Perhaps she *will* in time be happy and sensible like them,' she said to herself; 'and then your lessons will bear their proper fruits, and you will be deceived like other husbands, and punished as you merit. If it were not for the honour of the Zouroffs I should pray for it!'

The Villa Nelaguine was full of people staying there, and was also but five miles distant from Monte Carlo.

Vere was never alone with her mother during the time that Lady Dolly graced the Riviera with her presence, carried her red umbrella under the palm-trees, and laid her borrowed napoleons on the colour.

No word of reproach, no word of complaint escaped her lips in her mother's presence, yet Lady Dolly felt vaguely frightened, and longed

to escape from her presence, as a prisoner longs to escape from the dock.

She stayed this December weather at Villafranca, where December meant blue sea, golden sunshine, and red roses, because she thought it was the right thing to do. If there had been people who had said—well, not quite nice things—it was better to stay with her daughter immediately on the return from Russia. So she did stay, and even had herself visited for a day or two by Mr. Vanderdecken on one of his perpetual voyages from London to Java, Japan, or Jupiter.

Her visit was politic and useful; but it cost her some pain, some fretfulness, and some apprehension.

The house was full of pleasant people, for Zouroff never could endure a day of even comparative solitude; and amidst them was a very handsome Italian noble, who was more agreeable to her than the Duc de Dinant had of late grown, and who was about to go to England to be attached to the embassy there, and who had the eyes of Othello with the manners of

Chesterfield, and whom she made her husband cordially invite to Chesham Place. She could play as high as she liked, and she could drive over to Monaco when she pleased, and no life suited her better than this life; where she could, whenever she chose, saunter through the aloes and palms to those magic halls where her favourite fever was always at its height, yet where everything looked so pretty, and appearances were always so well preserved, and she could say to everybody, 'They do have such good music—one can't help liking Monte Carlo!'

The place suited her in every way, and yet she felt stifled in it, and afraid.

Afraid of what? There was nothing on earth to be afraid of, she knew that.

Yet, when she saw the cold, weary, listless life of Vere and met the deep scorn of her eyes, and realised the absolute impotency of rank, and riches, and pleasure, and all her own adored gods, to console or even to pacify this young wounded soul, Lady Dolly was vaguely frightened, as the frivolous

are always frightened at any strength or depth of nature, or any glimpse of sheer despair.

Not to be consoled!

What can seem more strange to the shallow? What can seem more obstinate to the weak? Not to be consoled is to offend all swiftly forgetting humanity, most of whose memories are writ on water.

'It is very strange, she seems to one to enjoy nothing!' said Lady Dolly, one morning to Madame Nelaguine, when Prince Zouroff had announced at the noonday breakfast that he had purchased for his wife a famous historical diamond known in Memoirs and in European courts as the 'Roc's egg,' and Vere, with a brief word of thanks acknowledged the tidings, her mother thought indignantly, as though he had brought her a twopenny bunch of primroses.

'It is very strange!' repeated Lady Dolly. 'The idea of hearing that she had got the biggest diamond in all the world, except five, and receiving the news like that! Your

brother looked disappointed, I think, annoyed, —didn't you?'

'If he want ecstasies over a diamond he can give it to Noisette,' said Madame Nelaguine, with her little cold smile. 'I think he ought not to be annoyed that his wife is superior to Noisette.'

'Was Vera always as cold as that at St. Petersburg before her child's death?' pursued Lady Dolly, who never liked Madame Nelaguine's smiles.

'Yes; always the same.'

'Doesn't society amuse her in the least?'

'Not in the least. I quite understand why it does not do so. Without coquetry or ambition it is impossible to enjoy society much. Every pretty woman should be a flirt, every clever woman a politician; the aim, the animus, the intrigue, the rivalry that accompany each of those pursuits are the salt without which the great dinner were tasteless. A good many brainless creatures do, it is true, flutter through society all their lives for the mere pleasure of fluttering; but that is poor work after all,'

added Madame Nelaguine, ignoring the pretty flutterer to whom she was speaking. 'One needs an aim, just as an angler must have fish in the stream or he grows weary of whipping it. Now your Vera will never be a coquette because her temperament forbids it. She is too proud, and also men have the misfortune not to interest her. And I think she will never be a politician; at least, she is interested in great questions, but the small means by which men strive to accomplish their aims disgust her, and she will never be a diplomatist. In the first week she was in Russia she compromised Sergius seriously at the Imperial Court by praising a Nihilist novelist to the Empress!'

'Oh, I know!' said Lady Dolly, desperately. 'She has not two grains of sense. She is beautiful and distinguished looking. When you have said that you have said everything that is to be said. The education she had with her grandmother made her hopelessly stupid, actually *stupid!*'

'She is very far from stupid, pardon me,' said Madame Nelaguine, with a delicate little

smile. 'But she has not your happy adaptability, *chère madame.* It is her misfortune.'

'A misfortune, indeed,' said Lady Dolly, a little sharply, feeling that her superiority was being despised. 'It is always a misfortune to be unnatural, and she is unnatural. She takes no pleasure in anything that delights everyone else; she hardly knows serge from sicilienne; she has no tact because she does not think it worth while to have any. She will offend a king as indifferently as she will change her dress; every kind of amusement bores her, she is made like that. When everybody is laughing round her she looks grave, and stares like an owl with her great eyes. Oh, dear me; to think she should be my daughter! Nothing odder ever could be than that Vera should be my child.'

'Except that she should be my brother's wife,' said Madame Nelaguine, drily. Lady Dolly was silent.

The next day Lady Dolly took advantage of her husband's escort to leave the Villa Nelaguine for England; she went with reluc-

tance, yet with relief. She was envious of her daughter, and she was impatient with her, and, though she told herself again and again that Vere's destiny had fallen in a golden paradise, the east wind, that she hated, moaning through the palms seemed to send after her homeward a long-drawn despairing sigh—the sigh of a young life ruined.

Prince Zouroff stayed on in the south, detained there by the seduction of the gaming-tables, until the Christmas season was passed; then, having won very largely, as very rich men often do, he left the Riviera for his handsome hotel in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne; and Madame Nelaguine left it also.

Like many of their country people they were true children of Paris, and were seldom thoroughly content unless they were within sight of the dome of the Invalides.

He felt he would breathe more freely when from the windows of the railway carriage he should see the zinc roofs and shining gilt cupolas of his one heaven upon earth.

'Another year with only her face to look at, with its eyes of unending reproach, and I should have gone mad, or cut her throat,' he said in a moment of confidence to one of his confidants and parasites.

They had never been alone one day, indeed; troops of guests had always been about them; but it had not been Paris, Paris with its consolations, its charm, and its crowds.

In Paris he could forget completely that he had ever married, save when it might please his pride to hear the world tell him that he had the most beautiful woman in Europe for his wife.

'Can you not sleep? do not stare so with your great eyes!' said Prince Zouroff angrily to his wife, as the night train rushed through the heart of France, and Vere gazed out over the snow-whitened moonlit country, as the land and the sky seemed to fly past her.

In another carriage behind her was her great jewel box, set between two servants, whose whole duty was to guard it.

But she never thought of her jewels; she

was thinking of the moth and the star; she was thinking of the summer morning on the white cliff of the sea. For she knew that Corrèze was in Paris.

It was not any sort of love that moved her, beyond such lingering charmed fancy as remained from those few hours' fascination. But a great reluctance to see him, a great fear of seeing him, was in her. What could he think of her marriage! And she could never tell him why she had married thus. He would think her sold like the rest, and he must be left to think so.

The express train rushed on through the cold calm night. With every moment she drew nearer to him—the man who had bidden her keep herself 'unspotted from the world.'

'And what is my life,' she thought, 'except one long pollution!'

She leaned her white cheek and her fair head against the window, and gazed out at the dark flying masses of the clouds; her eyes were full of pain, wide opened, lustrous; and, waking suddenly and seeing her thus

opposite him, her husband called to her roughly and irritably with an oath: 'Can you not sleep?'

It seemed to her as if she never slept now. What served her as sleep seemed but a troubled feverish dull trance, disturbed by hateful dreams.

It was seven o'clock on the following evening when they arrived in Paris. Their carriage was waiting, and she and Madame Nelaguine drove homeward together, leaving Zouroff to follow them. There was a faint light of an aurora borealis in the sky, and the lamps of the streets were sparkling in millions; the weather was very cold. Their coachman took his way past the opera-house. There were immense crowds and long lines of equipages.

In large letters in the strong gaslight it was easy to read upon the placards.

Faust . . . CORRÈZE.

The opera was about to commence.

Vere shrank back into the depths of the

carriage. Her companion leaned forward and looked out into the night.

'Paris is so fickle; but there is one sovereign she never tires of—it is Corrèze,' said Madame Nelaguine, with a little laugh, and wondered to see the colourless cheek of her young sister-in-law flush suddenly and then grow white again.

'Have you ever heard Corrèze sing?' she asked quickly. Vere hesitated.

'Never in the opera. No.'

'Ah! to be sure, he left Russia suddenly last winter; left as you entered it,' said Madame Nelaguine, musing, and with a quick side-glance.

Vere was silent.

The carriage rolled on, and passed into the courtyard of the Hotel Zouroff between the gilded iron gates, at the instant when the applause of Paris welcomed upon the stage of its opera its public favourite.

The house was grand, gorgeous, brilliant; adorned in the taste of the Second Empire, to which it belonged; glittering and over-laden,

superb yet meretricious. The lines of servants were bowing low; the gilded gaseliers were glowing with light, there were masses of camellias and azaleas, beautiful and scentless, and heavy odours of burnt pastilles on the heated air.

Vere passed up the wide staircase slowly, and the hues of its scarlet carpeting seemed like fire to her tired eyes.

She changed her prison-house often, and each one had been made more splendid than the last, but each in its turn was no less a prison; and its gilding made it but the more dreary and the more oppressive to her.

'You will excuse me, I am tired,' she murmured to her sister-in-law, who was to be her guest, and she went into her own bedchamber and shut herself in, shutting out even her maid from her solitude.

Through the curtained windows there came a low muffled sound; the sound of the great night-world of that Paris to which she had come, heralded for her beauty by a thousand tongues.

Why could she not be happy?'

She dropped on her knees by her bed of white satin, embroided with garlanded roses, and let her head fall on her arms, and wept bitterly.

In the opera-house the curtain had risen, and the realisation of all he had lost was dawning upon the vision of Faust.

The voice of her husband came to her through the door.

'Make your toilette rapidly,' he said; 'we will dine quickly; there will be time to show yourself at the opera.'

Vere started and rose to her feet.

'I am very tired; the journey was long.'

'We will not stay,' answered Prince Zouroff. 'But you will show yourself. Dress quickly.'

'Would not another night——'

'*Ma chère*, do not dispute. I am not used to it.'

The words were slight, but the accent gave them a cold and hard command, to which she had grown accustomed.

She said nothing more, but let her maid enter by an inner door.

The tears were wet on her lashes, and her mouth still quivered. The woman saw and pitied her, but with some contempt.

'Why do you lament like that?' the woman thought; 'why not amuse yourself?'

Her maids were used to the caprices of Prince Zouroff, which made his wife's toilette a thing which must be accomplished to perfection in almost a moment of time. A very young and lovely woman, also, can be more easily adorned than one who needs a thousand artificial aids. They dressed her very rapidly in white velvet, setting some sapphires and diamonds in her bright hair.

'Give me that necklace,' she said, pointing to one of the partitions in one of the open jewel cases; it was the necklace of the moth and the star.

In ten minutes she descended to dinner. She and her husband were alone. Madame Nelaguine had gone to bed fatigued.

He ate little, but drank much, though one

of the finest artists of the Paris kitchens had done his best to tempt his taste with the rarest and most delicate combination.

'You do not seem to have much appetite,' he said, after a little while. 'We may as well go. You look very well now.'

He looked at her narrowly.

Fatigue conquered, and emotion subdued, had given an unusual brilliancy to her eyes, an unusual flush to her cheeks. The white velvet was scarcely whiter than her skin; about her beautiful throat the moth trembled between the flame and the star.

'Have you followed my advice and put some rouge?' he asked suddenly.

Vere answered simply: 'No.'

'Paris will say that you are handsomer than any of the others,' he said carelessly. 'Let us go.'

Vere's cheeks flushed more deeply as she rose in obedience. She knew that he was thinking of all the other women whom Paris had associated with his name.

She drew about her a cloak of white feathers,

and went to her carriage. Her heart was sick, yet it beat fast. She had learned to be quite still, and to show nothing that she felt under all pain; and this emotion was scarcely pain, this sense that so soon the voice of Corrèze would reach her ear.

She was very tired; all the night before she had not slept; the fatigue and feverishness of the long unbroken journey were upon her, making her temples throb, her head swim, her limbs feel light as air. But the excitement of one idea sustained her, and made her pulses quicken with fictitious strength: so soon she would hear the voice of Corrèze.

A vague dread, a sense of apprehension that she could not have explained, were upon her; yet a delighted expectation came over her also, and was sweeter than any feeling that had ever been possible to her since her marriage.

As their carriage passed through the streets, her husband smoked a cigarette, and did not speak at all. She was thankful for the silence, though she fancied in it he must hear the loud fast beating of her heart.

It was ten o'clock when they reached the opera-house. Her husband gave her his arm, and they passed through the vestibule and passage, and up the staircase to that door which at the commencement of the season had been allotted to the name of Prince Zouroff.

The house was hushed; the music, which has all the ecstasy and the mystery of human passion in it, thrilled through the stillness. Her husband took her through the corridor into their box, which was next that which had once been the empress's. The vast circle of light seemed to whirl before her eyes.

Vere entered as though she were walking in her sleep, and sat down.

On the stage there were standing alone Margherita and Faust.

The lights fell full upon the classic profile of Corrèze, and his eyelids were drooped, as he stood gazing on the maiden who knelt at his feet. The costume he wore showed his graceful form to its greatest advantage, and the melancholy of wistful passion that was expressed on his face at that moment made his beauty

of feature more impressive. His voice was silent at the moment when she saw him thus once more, but his attitude was a poem, his face was the face that she had seen by sunlight where the sweetbriar sheltered the thrush.

Not for her was he Faust, not for her was he the public idol of Paris. He was the Saint Raphael of the Norman seashore. She sat like one spellbound gazing at the stage.

Then Corrèze raised his head, his lips parted, and uttered the

> Tu vuoi, ahime!
> Che t' abbandoni.

It thrilled through the house, that exquisite and mysterious music of the human voice, seeming to bring with it the echo of a heaven for ever lost.

Women, indifferent to all else, would weep when they heard the voice of Corrèze.

Vere's heart stood still; then seemed to leap in her breast as with a throb of new warm life. Unforgotten, unchanged, unlike any other ever heard on earth, this perfect voice fell on her ear again, and held her entranced with its

harmony. The ear has its ecstasy as have other senses, and this ecstasy for the moment held in suspense all other emotion, all other memory.

She sat quite motionless, leaning her cheek upon her hand. When he sang, she only then seemed herself to live; when his voice ceased, she seemed to lose hold upon existence, and the great world of light around her seemed empty and mute.

Many eyes were turning on her, many tongues were whispering of her, but she was unconscious of them. Her husband, glancing at her, thought that no other woman would have been so indifferent to the stare of Paris as she was; he did not know that she was insensible of it; he only saw that she had grown very pale again, and was annoyed, fearing that her entry would not be the brilliant success that he desired it to be.

'Perhaps she was too tired to come here, he thought with some impatience.

But Paris was looking at her in her white velvet, which was like the snows she had quitted, and was finding her lovely beyond compare,

and worthy of the wild rumours of adoration that had come before her from the north.

The opera, meanwhile, went on its course; the scenes changed, the third act ended, the curtain fell, the theatre resounded with the polite applause of a cultured city.

She seemed to awake as from a dream. The door had opened, and her husband was presenting some great persons to her.

'You have eclipsed even Corrèze, Princess,' said one of these. 'In looking at you, Paris forgot for once to listen to its nightingale. It was fortunate for him, since he sung half a note false.'

'Since you are so tired we will go,' said her husband, when the fourth act was over; when a score of great men had bowed themselves in and out of her box, and the glasses of the whole house had been levelled at the Russian beauty, as they termed her.

'I am not so very tired now!' she said wistfully.

She longed to hear that voice of Faust as she had never longed for anything.

'If you are not tired you are capricious, *ma chère*,' said her husband, with a laugh. 'I brought you here that they might see you; they have seen you; now I am going to the club. Come.'

He wrapped her white feathery mantle round her, as though it were snow that covered her, and took her away from the theatre as the curtain rose.

He left her to go homeward alone, and went himself to the Rue Scribe.

She was thankful.

'You sang false, Corrèze!' said mocking voices of women gaily round him in the *foyer*. He was so eminent, so perfect, so felicitously at the apex of his triumph and of art, that a momentary failure could be made a jest of without fear.

'Pardieu!' said Corrèze, with a shrug of his shoulders. 'Pardieu! do you suppose I did not know it. A fly flew in my throat. I suppose it will be in all the papers to-morrow. That is the sweet side of fame.'

He shook himself free of his tormentors,

and went to his brougham as soon as his dress was changed. It was only one o'clock, and he had all Paris ready to amuse him.

But he felt out of tone and out of temper with all Paris; another half-note false and Paris would hiss him—even him.

He went home to his house in the Avenue Marigny, and sent his coachman away.

'The beast!' he said to himself, as he entered his chamber; he was thinking of Sergius Zouroff. He threw himself down in an easy chair, and sat alone lost in thought; whilst a score of supper-tables were the duller for his absence, and more than one woman's heart ached, or passion fretted, at it.

'Who would have thought the sight of her would have moved me so!' he said to himself in self-scorn. 'A false note!—I!'

CHAPTER XIII.

In the bitter February weather all aristocratic Paris felt the gayer, because the vast Hotel Zouroff, in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, had its scarlet-clad *suisse* leaning on his gold-headed staff at its portals, and its tribes of liveried and unliveried lacqueys languishing in its halls and ante-rooms; since these signs showed that the Prince and Princess were *en ville*, and that the renowned beauty of the Winter Palace had brought her loveliness and her diamonds to the capital of the world.

The Hotel Zouroff, under Nadine Nelaguine, had been always one of those grand foreign

houses at which all great people meet; a noble *terra nullius* in which all political differences were obliterated, and all that was either well born or well received met, and the Empire touched the Faubourg, and the Orléans princes brushed the marshals of the Republic. The Hotel Zouroff had never been very exclusive, but it had always been very brilliant. Under the young Princess, Paris saw that it was likely to be much more exclusive, and perhaps in proportion less entertaining. There was that in the serene simplicity, the proud serious grace of the new mistress of it, which rallied to her the old régime and scared away the new.

'You should have been born a hundred years ago,' said her husband with some impatience to her. 'You would make the house the Hotel Rambouillet.'

'I do not care for the stories of the "Figaro," at my dinner-table, and I do not care to see the romp of the cotillon in my ball-room; but it is your house, it must be ordered as you please,' she answered

him; and she let Madame Nelaguine take the reins of social government, and held herself aloof.

But though she effaced herself as much as possible, that tall slender proud figure, with the grave colourless face that was so cold and yet so innocent, had an effect that was not to be defined, yet not to be resisted, as she received the guests of the Hotel Zouroff; and the entertainments there, though they gained in simplicity and dignity, lost in *entrain.* Vere was not suited to her century.

Houses take their atmosphere from those who live in them, and even the Hotel Zouroff, despite its traditions and its epoch, despite its excess of magnificence and its follies of expenditure, yet had a fresher and a purer air since the life of its new princess had come into it.

'You have married a young saint, and the house feels already like a sacristy,' said the Duchesse de Sonnaz to Sergius Zouroff, '*Ça nous obsède, mon vieux!*'

That was the feeling of society.

She was exquisitely lovely; she had a great distinction, she knew a great deal and though she spoke seldom, spoke well, but she was *obsédante*; she made them feel as if they were in church.

Yet Paris spoke of nothing for the moment but of the Princess Zouroff. Reigning beauties were for the moment all dethroned, and, as Paris had for years talked of his racers, his mistresses, his play, and his vices, so it now talked of Sergius Zouroff's wife.

That fair, grave, colourless face, so innocent yet so proud, so childlike yet so thoughtful, with its musing eyes and its arched mouth, became the theme of artists, the adoration of dandies, the despair of women. As a maiden she would have been called lovely, but too cold, and passed over. Married, she had that position which adorns as diamonds adorn, and that charm as of forbidden fruit, which piques the sated palate of mankind.

She was the event of the year.

Her husband was not surprised either at her fame or her failure.

He had foreseen both after the first week of his marriage. 'She will be the rage for a season, for her face and her form,' he said to himself. 'Then they will find her *entêtée* and stupid, and turn to some one else.' He honestly thought her stupid.

She knew Greek and Latin and all that, but of the things that make a woman brilliant she knew nothing.

Life seemed to Vere noisy, tedious, glaring, beyond conception; she seemed, to herself, always to be *en scène*; always to be being dressed and being undressed for some fresh spectacle; always to be surrounded with flatterers, and to be destitute of friends, never to be alone. It seemed to her wonderful that people who could rule their own lives chose incessant fatigue and called it pleasure. She understood it in nothing. That her mother, after twenty years of it, could yet pursue this life with excitement and preference seemed to

her so strange that it made her shudder. There was not an hour for thought, scarcely a moment for prayer. She was very young, and she rose early while the world was still sleeping, and tried so to gain some little time for her old habits, her old tastes, her old studies, but it was very difficult; she seemed to grow dizzy, tired, useless. 'It was what I was sold to be,' she used to think bitterly. Her husband was fastidious as to her appearance, and inexorable as to her perpetual display of herself; for the rest he said nothing to her, unless it were to sharply reprove her for some oblivion of some trifle in etiquette, some unconscious transgression of the innumerable unwritten laws of society.

In the midst of the most brilliant circle of Europe, Vere was as lonely as any captured bird. She would have been glad of a friend, but she was shy and proud; women were envious of her, and men were afraid of her. She was not like her world or her time. She was beautiful, but no one would ever have dreamed of classing her with 'the beauties' made by princely

praise and public portraiture. She was as unlike them as the beauty of perfect statuary is unlike the Lilith and the Vivienne of modern painting.

Sometimes her husband was proud of that, sometimes he was annoyed at it. Soon he felt neither pride nor annoyance, but grew indifferent.

Society noticed that she seldom smiled. When a smile did come upon her face, it was as cold as the moonbeam that flits bright and brief across a landscape on a cloudy night. Very close observers saw that it was not coldness, but a melancholy too profound for her years that had robbed the light from her thoughtful eyes; but close observers in society are not numerous, and her world in general believed her incapable of any emotion, or any sentiment, save that of a great pride.

They did not know that in the stead of any pride what weighed on her night and day was the bitterness of humiliation—humiliation they would never have understood—with which

no one would have sympathised; a shame that made her say to herself, when she went to her tribune at Chantilly, to see her husband's horses run, 'My place should be apart there, with those lost women; what am I better than they?'

All the horror of the sin of the world had fallen suddenly on her ignorance and innocence as an avalanche may fall on a young chamois; the knowledge of it oppressed her, and made a great disgust stay always with her as her hourly burden.

She despised herself, and there is no shame more bitter to endure.

'You are unreasonable, my child,' said her sister-in-law, who, in a cold way, was attached to her, and did pity her. 'Any other woman as young as yourself would be happy. My brother is not your ideal. No; that was not to be expected or hoped for; but he leaves you your own way; he is not a tyrant, he lets you enjoy yourself as you may please to do; he never controls your purse or your caprice. Believe me, my love, that, as the world goes,

this is as nearly happiness as can be found in marriage—to have plenty of money and to be let alone. You want happiness, I know, but I doubt very much if happiness is really existent anywhere on earth, unless you can get it out of social success and the discomfiture of rivals, as most fortunate women do. I think you are unreasonable. You are not offended? No?'

'Perhaps I am unreasonable,' assented Vere.

She never spoke of herself. Her lips had been shut on the day that she had accepted the hand of Sergius Zouroff, and she kept them closed.

She would have seemed unreasonable to everyone, as to Princess Nelaguine, had she done so.

Why could she not be happy?

With youth, a lovely face and form, the great world her own, and her riches boundless, why could she not be happy, or, at the least, amused and flattered?

Amusement and flattery console most women,

but they had failed as yet to console her. By example or by precept everyone about her made her feel that they should do so. Upon the danger of the teaching neither her husband nor society ever reflected.

Young lives are tossed upon the stream of the world, like rose-leaves on a fast-running river, and the rose-leaves are blamed if the river be too strong and too swift for them, and they perish. It is the fault of the rose-leaves.

When she thought that this life must endure all her life, she felt a despair that numbed her, as frost kills a flower. To the very young, life looks so long.

To Sergius Zouroff innocence was nothing more than the virgin bloom of a slave had been to his father—a thing to be destroyed for an owner's diversion.

It amused him to lower her, morally and physically, and he cast all the naked truths of human vices before her shrinking mind, as he made her body tremble at his touch. It was a diversion, whilst the effect was novel. Like

many another man, he never asked himself how the fidelity and the chastity that he still expected to have preserved for him, would survive his own work of destruction. He never remembered that as you sow so you may reap. Nor if he had remembered would he have cared. *Toute femme triche* was engraved on his conviction as a certain doctrine. The purity and the simplicity, and the serious sense of right and wrong that he discovered in Vere bewildered him, and half-awed, half-irritated him. But that these would last after contact with the world, he never for a moment believed, and he quickly ceased to regard or to respect them.

He knew very well that his wife and his *belles petites* were creatures so dissimilar that it seemed scarcely possible that the same laws of nature had created and sustained them, the same humanity claimed them. He knew that they were as unlike as the dove and the snake, as the rose and the nightshade, but he treated them both the same.

There was a woman who was seen on the

Bois who drove with white Spanish mules hung about with Spanish trappings, and had a little mulatto boy behind her dressed in scarlet. This eccentric person was speedily celebrated in Paris. She was handsome in a very dark, full-lipped, almond-eyed, mulattress fashion; she got the name of Casse-une-Croûte, and no one ever heard or cared whether she ever had had any other. Casse-une-Croûte, who was a mustang from over the seas, had made her début modestly with a banker, but she had soon blazed into that splendour in which bankers, unless they are Rothschilds, are despised. Prince Zouroff had seen the white mules, and been struck with them. Casse-une-Croûte had an apotheosis.

There was an actress who was called Noisette; she was very handsome too, in a red and white way, like Rubens's women; she too drove herself, but drove a mail-phaeton and very high-stepping English horses; she drank only Burgundy, but plenty of it; she had a *hôtel entre cour et jardin;* on the stage she was very vulgar but she had *du chien* and wonderful drolleries

of expression. Prince Zouroff did not care even to look at her, but she was the fashion, and he had taken her away from his most intimate friend; so, for years, he let her eat his roubles as a mouse eats rice, and never could prevail on his vanity to break with her, lest men should think she had broken with him.

In that unexplainable, instinctive way in which women of quick perceptions come to know things that no one ever tells them, and which is never definitely put before them in words, Princess Zouroff became gradually aware that Noisette and Casse-une-Croûte were both the property of her husband. The white mules or the mail phaeton crossed her own carriage-horses a dozen times a week in the Champs Elysées, and she looked away not to see those women, and said in the bitter humiliation of her heart, 'What am I better than either of them!' When either of them saw her, Casse-une-Croûte said, '*V'là la petite!*' contemptuously. Noisette said, '*Je mangerai même ses diamants à elle.*'

'Sergius,' said Nadine Nelaguine one night, 'in that wife that you neglect for your creatures you have a pearl of price.'

'And I am one of the swine, and best live with my kind,' said her brother savagely, because he was ashamed of himself, and angered with all his ways of life, yet knew that he would no more change them than will swine change theirs.

'You have married a young saint. It is infinitely droll!' said the Duchesse de Sonnaz, who was always called by her society Madame Jeanne, one day to Sergius Zouroff, as he sat with her in her boudoir that was full of *chinoiseries*, and Indian wares, and Persian potteries.

Jeanne de Sonnaz was a woman of thirty-three years old, and had been one of the few really great ladies who had condescended to accept the Second Empire. Born of the splendid Maison de Merilhac, and married to the head of the scarce less ancient Maison de Sonnaz, she belonged, root and branch, to the *vieille souche*, and her people all went annually to bow

the knee at Frohsdorf. But Mdme. Jeanne, wedded at sixteen to a man who was wax in her hands, had no fancy for sacrifice and seclusion for the sake of a shadow and a lily. She was a woman who loved admiration and who loved display. She had condescended to accept the Second Empire, because it was the millennium of these her twin passions. She had known that it would not last, but she had enjoyed it while it did. '*C'est un obus qui va s'eclâter*,' she had always said cheerfully, but meanwhile she had danced on the shell till it exploded, and now danced on its débris.

The Duchesse de Sonnaz dressed better than any living being; was charming, without having a good feature in her face except her eyes, and was admired where Helen or Venus might have been overlooked. She was not very clever, but she was very malicious, which is more successful with society, and very violent, which is more successful with lovers. She had the power of being very agreeable. To the young Princess Zouroff she made herself even unusually so.

Vere did not notice that even a polite society could not help a smile when it saw them together.

'You have married a young saint; it is very droll,' the duchesse now said for the twentieth time to Zouroff. 'But do you know that I like her? Is not that very droll too?'

'It is very fortunate for me,' said Zouroff drily, wondering if she were telling him a lie, and, if so, why she told one.

She was not lying; though, when she had first heard of his intended marriage, she had been beside herself with rage, and had even rung violently for them to send her husband to her that she might cry aloud to him, 'you never revenge yourself, but you must and you shall revenge me.' Fortunately for the peace of Europe her husband was at the club, and by the time he had returned thence she had thought better of it.

'What will you do with a saint?' she continued now. 'It is not a thing for you. It must be like that White Swan in "Lohengrin."'

'She is stupid,' said Zouroff; 'but she is very honest.'

'How amusing a combination!'

'I do not see much of her,' Zouroff added with an air of fatigue. 'I think she will be always the same. She does not adapt herself. It is a pity her children should not live. She is the sort of woman to be a devoted mother.'

'*Quel beau rôle!* and she is not eighteen yet,' said Madame de Sonnaz with amusement.

'It is what we marry good women for,' he said somewhat gloomily. 'They never divert one; every one knows that. *Elles ne savent pas s'encanailler.*'

Jeanne de Sonnaz laughed again, but her face had an angry irony in it.

'Yes: *nous nous encanaillons*; that is our charm. A beautiful compliment. But it is true. It is the charm of our novels, of our theatres, of our epoch. *Le temps nous enfante.* Things manage themselves drolly. A man like you gets a young angel; and an honest,

stupid, innocent soul like my poor Paul gets —me.'

Zouroff offered her no compliment and no contradiction; he was sitting gloomily amidst the *chinoiseries* and porcelains, but their intercourse had long passed the stage at which flattery is needful. He was glad for sake of peace that she was not an enemy of Vere's; but he was annoyed to hear her praise his wife. Why did everyone regard the girl as sacrificed? It offended and annoyed him. She had everything that she could want. Hundreds of women would have asked no more admirable fate than was hers.

'She is of the old type; the old type pure are proud,' his friend pursued, unheeding his silence. 'We want to see it now and then. She would go grandly to the guillotine, but she will never understand her own times, and she will always have a contempt for them. She has dignity; we have not a scrap, we have forgotten what it was like; we go into a passion at the amount of our bills; we play and never pay; we smoke and we wrangle;

we have café-singers who teach us slang songs; we laugh loud, much too loud; we intrigue vulgarly, and, when we are found out, we scuffle, which is more vulgar still; we inspire nothing unless now and then a bad war or a disastrous speculation; we live showily, noisily, meanly, gaudily. You have said, "*On sait s'encanailler.*" Well, your wife is not like us. You should be thankful.'

'All the same,' said Zouroff, with a shrug of his shoulders; 'she is not amusing.'

'Oh, that is another affair. Even if she were, I do not believe you would go to your wife to be amused. I think you are simply discontented with her because she is not somebody else's wife. If she were fast and frivolous you would be angry at that.'

'She is certainly not fast or frivolous!'

'Perhaps my friend—after all—it is only that she is not happy.'

It was the one little poison-tipped arrow that she could not help speeding against the

man whose marriage had been an insult to a 'friendship' of many years' duration.

'If she were not a fool she would be perfectly happy,' he answered petulantly, and with a frown.

'Or if she understood compensations as we understand them,' said Mdme. de Sonnaz, lighting a cigarette. 'Perhaps she never will understand them. Or, perhaps, on the other hand, some day she will.'

'*Vous plaisantez, madame,*' said Sergius Zouroff with a growl, as the duchess laughed.

A sullen resentment rose in him against Vere. He had meant to forget her, once married to her. The marriage had been a caprice; he had been moved to a sudden passion that had been heightened by her aversion and her reluctance; she did as well as another to bear children and grace his name; he had never meant to make a burden of her, and now everyone had agreed to speak of her as a martyr to her position.

Her position! he thought; what woman in Europe would not have been happy in it?

Vere herself might have fanciful regrets and fantastic sentiments; that he could admit; she was a child, and had odd thoughts and tastes; but he resented the pity for her—pity for her as being his—that spoke by the cynical lips of his sister and Jeanne de Sonnaz.

He began almost to wish that she would be brought to understand the necessity *de s'encanailler*. There are times when the very purity of a woman annoys and oppresses a man—even when she is his wife; perhaps most of all when she is so.

If she had disobeyed him or had any fault against him, he could still have found some pleasure in tyranny over her; but she never rebelled, she never opposed him. Obedience was all she had to give him, and she gave it in all loyalty; her grandmother had reared her in old-world ideas of duty that she found utterly out of place in the day she lived in, yet she clung to them as she clung to her belief in heaven.

Her whole nature recoiled from the man

to whom she owed obedience, yet she knew obedience was his due, and she gave it. Although he would have borne with nothing less, yet this passive submission had begun to irritate him; his commands were caprices, wilful, changeable, and unreasonable. But as they were always obeyed, it ceased to be any amusement to impose them.

He began to think that she was merely stupid.

He would have believed that she was quite stupid, and nothing else, but for a certain look in her eyes now and then when she spoke, a certain gesture that occasionally escaped her of utter contempt and weariness. Then he caught sight for a moment of depths in Vere's nature that he did not fathom, of possibilities in her character that he did not take into consideration.

Had she been any other man's wife, the contradiction would have attracted him, and he would have studied her temper and her tastes.

As it was he only felt some irritation, and some ennui because his wife was not like his world.

'She is not amusing, and she is not grateful,' he would say; and each day he saw less of her and left her to shape her own life as she chose.

CHAPTER XIV.

In the chilly spring weather, Lady Dolly, sitting on one chair with her pretty little feet on another chair, was at Hurlingham watching the opening match of the year and saying to her friend Lady Stoat of Stichley; 'Oh my dear, yes, it is so sad, but you know my sweet child never was quite like other people; never will be I am afraid. And she never did care for me. It was all that horrid old woman, who brought her up so strangely, and divided entirely from me in every way, and made a perfect Methodist of her, really a Methodist! If Vere were not so exquisitely pretty she would be too ridiculous. As she is so handsome, men don't abuse

her so much as they would if she were only just nice-looking. But she is very *very* odd; and it is so horrible to be odd? I would really sooner have her ugly. She is so odd. Never would speak to me even of the birth and death of her baby. Could you believe it? Not a word! not a word! What would you feel if Gwendalin. . . . Goodness! the Duke and Fred have tied. Is it true, Colonel Rochfort? Yes? Thanks. A pencil, one moment; thanks. Ah, you never bet, Adine, do you? But, really, pigeon-shooting's very stupid if you don't. Talking of bets, Colonel Rochfort, try and get "two monkeys" for me on Tambour-Battant to-morrow, will you? I've been told a thing about his trainer; it will be quite safe, quite. As I was saying, dear, she never would speak to me about that poor little lost cherub. Was it not sad—terrible? Of course she will have plenty of others; but still, never to sorrow for it at all—so unnatural! Zouroff felt it much more; he has grown very nice, really very nice. Ah! that bird has got away; the Lords will lose, I am afraid, after

all. Ah, my dear Lesterel, how are you? What are they saying of my child in your Paris?'

The Marquis de Lesterel, secretary of legation, bowed smiling.

'Madame la Princesse has turned the head of "tout Paris." It was too cruel of you, madame; had you not already done mischief enough to men that you must distract them with such loveliness in your daughter?'

'All that is charming, and goes for nothing,' said Lady Dolly good-humouredly. 'I know Vera is handsome, but does she take? *Est-ce qu'elle a du charme*? That is much more.'

'But certainly!' rejoined the French marquis with much emphasis; 'she is very cold, it is true, which leaves us all lamenting; and nothing, or very little at least, seems to interest her.'

'Precisely what I expected!' said Lady Dolly despairingly. 'Then she has not *du charme*. Nobody has who is not amused and amused often.'

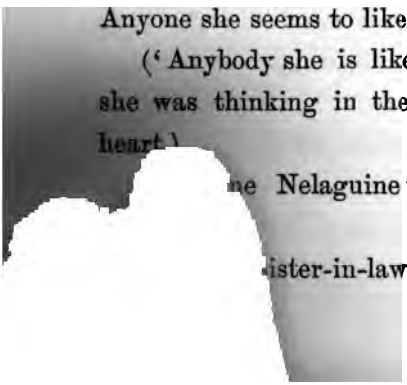
'Pardon!' said the marquis. 'There is *charme* and *charme*. There is that of the easily accessible and of the inaccessible, of the rose-bud and of the edelweiss.'

'Does she make many friends there?' she continued, pursuing her inquiries, curiosity masked as maternal interest. 'Many women-friends, I mean; I am so afraid Vera does not like women much, and there is nothing that looks so unamiable.'

'It would be impossible to suspect the Princess of unamiability,' said the marquis quickly. 'One look at that serene and noble countenance'——

'Very nice, very pretty; but Vere *can* be unamiable,' said her mother tartly. 'Do tell me, is there any women she takes to at all? Anyone she seems to like much.'

('Anybody she is likely to tell about me?' she was thinking in the apprehension of her heart.)



ne Nelaguine'—began the young

ister-in-law!' said Lady Dolly.

'Yes, I believe she does like that horrid woman. I always hated Nadine myself—such an ordering sharp creature, and such a tongue! Of course I know the Nelaguine is never out of their house; but is there anybody else?'

A little smile came on the face of the Parisian.

'The Princess is often with Madame de Sonnaz. Madame Jeanne admires her very much.'

Lady Dolly stared a minute, and then laughed; and Lady Stoat even smiled discreetly.

'I wonder what that is *for*,' murmured Lady Dolly vaguely, and, in a whisper to Lady Stoat, she added, 'She must mean mischief; she always means mischief; she took his marriage too quietly not to avenge herself.'

'People forget nowadays; I don't think they revenge,' said Lady Stoat consolingly.

'When did you see my poor darling last?' asked Lady Dolly aloud.

'At three o'clock last night, madame, at the Elysée. She looked like a Greek poet's dream draped by Worth.'

'How very imaginative!' said Lady Dolly, a little jealously. 'How could poor dear Worth dress a dream? That would tax even his powers! I hope she goes down to Surennes and chats with him quietly; that is the only way to get him to give his mind to anything really good. But she never cares about that sort of thing; never!'

'The Princess Zouroff knows well,' said the Marquis de Lesterel, with some malice and more ardour, 'that let her drape herself in what she might, were it sackcloth and ashes, she would be lovelier in it than any other woman ever was on earth—except her mother,' he added with a chivalrous bow.

'What a horrid thing it is to be anybody's mother! and how old it makes one feel—"shunt" it as one may!' thought Lady Dolly as she laughed and answered, 'You are actually in love with her, marquis! Pray remember that I *am* her mother, and that she has not

been married much more than a year. I am very delighted that she does please in Paris. It is her home, really her home. They will go to Petersburg once in ten years, but Paris will see them every year of their lives; Zouroff can be scarcely said to exist out of it. I am so very very sorry the boy died; it just lived to breathe and be baptised, you know; named after the Czar. So sad!—oh, so sad! Who is that shooting now? Regy? Ah-h-h! The bird is inside the palings, isn't it? Oh! that is superb! Just inside!—only just!'

And Lady Dolly scribbled again in a tiny betting-book, bound in oxydised silver, that had cost fifty guineas in Bond Street.

Lady Dolly was very fond of betting. As she practised it, it was both simple and agreeable. She was always paid, and never paid.

The ladies who pursue the art on these simplified principles are numerous, and find it profitable.

When Colonel Rochfort, a handsome young man in the Rifles, tried the next day to get her

five hundred 'on,' at Newmarket, the Ring was prudent; it would take it in his name, not in hers.

But the men of her world could not be as prudent—and as rude—as the Ring was. Besides, Lady Dorothy Vanderdecken was still a very pretty woman, with charming little tricks of manner and a cultured sagacious coquetry that was hard to resist; and she was very good company too at a little dinner at the Orleans Club, when the nightingales sang, or *tête-à-tête* in her fan-lined octagon boudoir.

Lady Dolly did not see much of her daughter. Lady Dolly had taken seriously to London. London had got so much nicer, she said, so much less starchy; so much more amusing; it was quite wonderful how London had improved since polo and pigeon-shooting had opened its mind. Sundays were great fun in London now, and all that old nonsense about being so very particular had quite gone out. London people, the very best of them, always seemed, somehow or other—what should one say?—provincial,

after Paris. Yes, provincial; but still London was very nice, and Lady Dorothy Vanderdecken was quite a great person in it; she had always managed so well that nobody ever had talked about her.

'It is so horrid to be talked about, you know,' she used to say; 'and, after all, so silly to *get* talked about. You can do just as you like if you are only careful to do the right things at the right time and be seen about with the right people. I am always so angry with those stupid women that are compromised; it is quite too dreadfully foolish of them, because, you know, *really*, nobody need be. People are always nice if one is nice to them.'

So, from New Year to Midsummer she was in the house in Chesham Place, which she made quite charming with all sorts of old Italian things and the sombre and stately Cinque Cento, effectively, if barbarously, mixed up with all the extravagancies of modern upholstery. Lady Dolly's house, under the combination of millinery and mediævalism, was too

perfect, everybody said; and she had a new friend in her Sicilian attached to the Italian Legation, who helped her a great deal with his good taste, and sent her things over from his grim old castles in the Taormina; and it was a new toy and amused her; and her fancy-dress frisks, and her musical breakfasts, were great successes; and, on the whole, Lady Dolly had grown very popular. As for Mr. Vanderdecken, he was always stingy and a bear, but he knew how to behave. He represented a remote and peaceable borough, which he had bought as his wife bought a poodle or a piece of *pâte tendre*; he snored decorously on the benches of St. Stephens, and went to ministerial dinners, and did other duties of a rich man's life; and, for the rest of his time, was absorbed in those foreign speculations and gigantic loans which constituted his business, and took him to Java, or Japan, or Jupiter so often. He was large, ugly, solemn, but he did extremely well in his place, which was an unobtrusive one, like the great Japanese bonze who sat cross-legged in the hall. What he thought no one knew; he

was as mute on the subject of his opinions as the bonze was. In the new order of fashionable marriage a silence that must never be broken is the part allotted to the husband; and the only part he is expected to take.

On the whole Lady Dolly was very contented. Now and then Jura would give her a sombre glance, or Zouroff a grim smile, that recalled a time to her when she had been on the very brink of the precipice, on the very edge of the outer darkness, and the recollection made her quite sick for the moment. But the qualm soon passed. She was quite safe now, and she had learned wisdom. She knew how to be 'so naughty and so nice' in the way that society in London likes, and never punishes. She had been very silly sometimes, but she was never silly now, and meant to never be silly any more. She tempered roulette with ritualism, and always went to St. Margaret's church in the morning of a Sunday, if she dined down at the Orleans or at old Skindle's in the evening. She had had a great 'scare,' and the peril and

the fright of it had sobered her and shown her the way she should go.

For Lady Dolly was always very careful of appearances; she had no patience with people who were not. 'It is such very bad form to make people talk,' she would always say; 'and it is so easy to stop their mouths.'

Lady Dolly liked to go to court, to be intimate with the best people, to dine at royal tables, and to 'be in the swim' altogether. Everybody knew she was a naughty little woman, but she had never been on the debateable land; she had never been one of the '*paniers à quinze sous;*' she had never been coldly looked on by anybody. She never let 'Jack,' or anybody who preceded or succeeded 'Jack,' get her into trouble. She liked to go everywhere, and she knew that, if people once begin to talk, you may very soon go nowhere.

She was not very wise in anything else, but she was very wise in knowing her own interests. Frightened and sobered, she had said to herself that it was a horrible thing to get any scandal

about you; to fall out of society; to have to content yourself with third-rate drawing-rooms; to have to take your gaieties in obscure continental towns; to reign still, but only reign over a lot of shady dubious *déclassé* people, some with titles and some without, but all 'nowhere' in the great race. It was a horrible thing; and she vowed to herself that never, never, never, should it be her fate.

So she took seriously to the big house in Chesham Place, and her religion became one of the prettiest trifles in all the town.

With her brougham full of hothouse flowers, going to the Children's Hospital, or shutting herself up and wearing black all Holy Week, she was a most edifying study. She maintained some orphans at the Princess Mary's pet home, and she was never absent if Stafford House had a new charitable craze. She did not go into extremes, for she had very good taste; but only said very innocently, 'Oh, all these things are second nature to me, you know; you know my poor Vere was a clergyman.'

If she did sing naughty little songs after

dinner on the lawn at the Orleans; if the Sicilian *attaché* were always rearranging pictures or tapestries in her drawing-rooms; if she did bet and lose and never pay; if she did go to fancy frisks in a few yards of gossamer and her jewels, nobody ever said anything, except that she was such a dear little woman. It is such a sensible thing to 'pull yourself together' and be wise in time.

Lord Jura, who was leading his old life, with Lady Dolly left out of it, stupidly and joylessly, because he had got into the groove of it, and could not get out, and who had become gloomy, taciturn, and inclined to drink more than was good for him, used to watch the comedy of Lady Dolly's better-ordered life with a cynical savage diversion. When he had come back from his Asiatic hunting tour, which had lasted eighteen months, he had met her as men and women do meet in society, no matter what tragedies divide or hatreds rage in them; but she had seen very well that 'Jack' was lost to her for ever. She did not even try to get him back; and when she heard men say that Jura

was not the good fellow he used to be, and played too high and drank too deep for the great name he bore, she was pleased, because he had had no earthly right to go off in that rough way, or say the things he had said.

'I never see very much of Jura now,' she would say to her friends. 'He is become so very *farouche* since that eastern trip; perhaps some woman—I said so to his dear old father last week—poor Jack is so good and so weak, he is just the man to fall a prey to a bad woman.'

The ladies to whom she said this laughed a little amongst themselves when they had left her, but they liked her all the better for ridding herself of an old embarrassment so prettily; it formed a very good precedent. Jura of course said nothing, except to his very intimate friends, who rallied him. To them he said, 'Well, I went to India, you know, and she didn't like it, and when I came back she had got the Sicilian fellow with her. So I don't bore her any more; she is a dear little woman; yes.'

For honour makes a lie our social life's chief necessity, and Jura, having thus lied for honour's sake, would think of the Princess Zouroff in Paris, and swear round oaths to himself, and go upstairs where they were playing baccarat, and signing fortunes and estates away with the scrawl of a watch-chain's pencil.

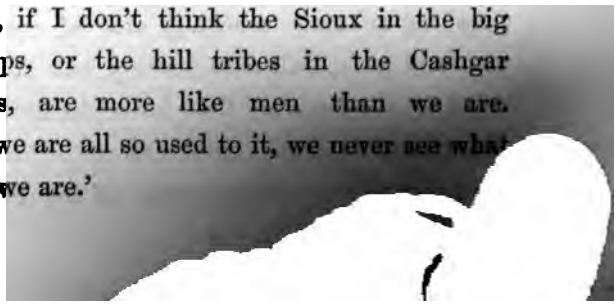
'I think I could have made her happy if it hadn't been impossible,' he would think sometimes. 'She would always have been miles beyond me, and no man that ever lived would have been good enough for her; but I think I could have made her happy; I would have served her and followed her like a dog—anyway, I would have been true to her, and kept my life decent and clean; not like that brute's.'

Then he would curse Sergius Zouroff, as he went home alone down St. James's Street in the grey fog of early morning, sick of pleasure, weary of play, dull with brandy, but not consoled by it; knowing that he might have been a better man, seeing the better ways too late; loathing the senseless routine of his life, but

too listless to shake off habit and custom, and find out any different or higher life.

He was Earl of Jura; he had a vast inheritance; he had good health and good looks; he was sound in wind and limb; he had a fair share of intelligence, if his mind was slow; in a few years, when he should succeed to his father, he would have a thousand pounds a day as his income. Yet he had got as utterly into a groove that he hated as any ploughman that rises every day to tread the same fields behind the same cattle; and habit made him as powerless to get out of it as his poverty makes the ploughman.

'London is the first city in the world, they say,' he thought, as he went down St. James's in the mists that made a summer morning cheerless as winter, and as colourless. 'Well, it may be, for aught I know; but, damn it all, if I don't think the Sioux in the big swamps, or the hill tribes in the Cashgar passes, are more like men than we are. And we are all so used to it, we never see what fools we are.'



CHAPTER XV.

One morning the young Duke of Mull and Cantire arrived in Paris, where he was seldom seen, and chanced to find his cousin alone in her morning room at the Hôtel Zouroff.

He was a good-looking young man, with a stupid honest face; he dressed shabbily and roughly, yet always looked like a gentleman. He had no talents, but, to compensate, he had no vices; he was very simple, very loyal, and very trustful. He was fond of Vere, and had been dismayed at the marriage so rapidly arranged; but he had seen her at St. Petersburg, and was relieved by her coldness and calm into thinking her consoled by ambition.

'I am about to marry too,' he said, with a shamefaced laugh, a little while after his entrance. 'I have asked her again and she says "Yes." I ran down to Paris to tell you this.'

Vere looked at him with dismay.

'You do not mean Fuschia Leach?' she said quickly.

The young duke nodded.

'She's quite too awfully pretty, you know; a fellow can't help it.'

'She is pretty, certainly.'

'Oh, hang it, Vere, that's worse than abusing her. You hate her, I can see. Of course I know she isn't our form, but—but—I am very fond of her; dreadfully fond of her; and you will see, in a year or two, how fast she will pick it all up——'

Vere sat silent.

She was deeply angered; her chief fault was pride, an incurable pride of birth with all its prejudices, strong as the prejudices of youth alone can be.

'Won't you say something kind?' faltered her cousin.

'I cannot pretend what I do not feel,' she said coldly. 'I think such a marriage a great unworthiness, a great disgrace. This—this—person is not a gentlewoman, and never will be one, and I think that you will repent giving your name to her—if you do ever give it.'

'I give it most certainly,' said the young lover hotly and sullenly; 'and if you and I are to be friends, dear, in the future, you must welcome her as a friend too.'

'I shall not ever do that,' said Vere simply; but the words, though they were so calm, gave him a chill.

'I suppose you will turn the forests into coal-mines now?' she added, after a moment's pause. The young man reddened.

'Poor grandmamma!' said Vere wistfully, and her eyes filled with tears.

The stern old woman loved her grandchildren well, and had done her best by them, and all they were fated to bring her in her old age were pain and humiliation.

Would the old duchess ever force herself to touch the flower-like cheek of Fuschia Leach

with a kiss of greeting? Never, thought Vere; never, never!

'When all is said and done,' muttered the young duke angrily, 'what is the utmost you can bring against my poor love? That she is not our form? That she doesn't talk in our way, but says "cunning" where we say "nice"? Is that a great crime? She is exquisitely pretty. She is as clever as anything—a prince of the blood might be proud of her. She has a foot for Cinderella's slipper. She never tried to catch me, not she; she sent me about my business twice; laughed at me because I wear such old hats; she's as frank as sunlight! God bless her!'

'I think we will not speak of her,' said Vere, coldly. 'Of course you do as you please. I used to think Herbert of Mull a great name, but perhaps I was mistaken. I was only a child. I am almost glad it has ceased to be mine, since so soon she will own it. Will you not stay to dinner, Monsieur Zouroff will be most happy to see you?'

'I will see your husband before I leave

Paris,' said the young man, a little moodily, 'and I am very sorry you take it like that, Vere, because you and I were always good friends at old Bulmer.'

'I think you will find everyone will take it like that—who cares for you or your honour.'

'Honour!—Vere, I should be so sorry to quarrel. We won't discuss this thing. It is no use.'

'No. It is no use.'

But she sighed as she spoke; it was a link the more added to the heavy chain that she dragged with her now. Everyone seemed failing her, and all old faiths seemed changing. He was the head of her family, and she knew his uprightness, his excellence, his stainless honour—and he was about to marry Fuschia Leach.

The visit of her cousin brought back to her, poignantly and freshly, the pain of the letter written to her on her own marriage from Bulmer. A great longing for that old innocent life, all dull and sombre though it had been, came on her as she sat in solitude after he had

left her, and thought of the dark wet woods, the rough grey seas, the long gallops on forest ponies, the keen force of the north wind beating and bending the gnarled storm-shaven trees.

What she would have given to have been Vere Herbert once again! never to have known this weary, gilded, perfumed, decorated, restless and insincere world to which she had been sold!

'Really I don't know what to say,' said Lady Dolly, when, in her turn, she heard the tidings in London. 'No, really I don't. Of course you ought to marry money, Frank; an immensity of money; and most of these Americans have such heaps. It is a very bad marriage for you, very; and yet she is so very much the fashion, I really don't know what to say. And it will drive your grandmother wild, which will be delightful; and these American women always get on somehow; they have a way of getting on; I dare say she will be Mistress of the Robes some day, and all sorts of things. She is horribly bad form; you don't mind my saying so, because you must see it for yourself. But then it goes down, and it

pleases better than anything; so, after all, I am not sure that it matters. And, besides, she will change wonderfully when she is Duchess of Mull. All those wild little republicans get as starchy as possible once they get a European title. They are just like those scatter-brained princes in history, that turn out such stern good-goody sort of despots, when once the crown is on their heads. Really, I don't know what to say. I knew quite well she meant to get you when she went to Stagholme this October after you. Oh, you thought it was accident, did you? How innocent of you, and how nice! You ought to have married more money; and it is horrible to have a wife who never had a grandfather; but still, I don't know, she will make your place very lively, and she won't let you wear old hats. Yes—yes—you might have done worse. You might have married out of a music-hall or a circus. Some of them do. And, after all, Fuschia Leach is a person everybody can *know*.'

The young lover did not feel much comforted by this form of congratulation, but it

was the best that any of his own family and friends had given him, and Lady Dolly quite meant to be kind.

She was rather glad herself that the American would be Duchess of Mull. She had hated all the Herberts for many a long year, and she knew that, one and all, they would sooner have seen the young chief of their race in his grave. Lady Dolly felt that in large things and little, Providence, after treating her very badly, was at last giving her her own way.

The young Duke of Mull a month later had *his* way, and married his brilliant Fuschia in the teeth of the stiffest opposition and blackest anathemas from his family. Not one of them deigned to be present at the ceremony of his sacrifice except his aunt, Lady Dorothy Vanderdecken, who said to her friends:—

'I hate the thing quite as much as they all do, but I can't be ill-natured, and poor Frank feels it so; and, after all, you know, he might have married out of a music-hall or a circus. So many of them do.'

People said what a dear little amiable woman she was; so different from her daughter; and, on the whole, the marriage, with choral service at the Abbey, and breakfast at a monster hotel where Mrs. Leach had a whole half of the first floor, was a very magnificent affair, and was adorned with great names despite the ominous absence of the Herberts of Mull.

'I'm glad that girl put my monkey up about the coal, and made me whistle him back,' thought the brilliant Fuschia to herself as the choir sang her epithalamium. 'It's a whole suit and all the buttons on; after all, a duchess is always a four-horse concern when she's an English one; and they do think it some pumpkins at home. I'm afraid the money's whittled away a good deal, but we'll dig for that coal before the year's out. Duchess of Mull and Cantire! After all it's a big thing, and sounds smart.

And the bells, as they rang, seemed to her fancy to ring that and that only all over London. 'Duchess of Mull! Duchess of Mull!'

It was a raw, dark, rainy day, in the middle of March, as unpleasant as London weather could possibly be; but the shining eyes of the lovely Fuschia, and her jewels, and her smiles, seemed to change the sooty, murky, mists to tropic sunshine.

'How will you quarter the arms, Frank?' whispered Lady Dolly, as she bade her nephew adieu. 'A pig *gules* with a knife in its throat, and a bottle *argent* of pick-me-up?—how nice the new blazonries will look!'

But the young duke had no ears for her.

Very uselessly, but very feverishly, the obligation to call Fuschia Leach cousin irritated the Princess Zouroff into an unceasing pain and anger. To her own cousin on the marriage she sent a malachite cabinet and some grand jade vases, and there ended her acknowledgment of it. She was offended, and did not conceal it.

When the world who had adored Pick-me-up as a maiden, found Pick-me-up as Duchess of Mull and Cantire as adorable as another generation had found Georgina Duchess of

Devonshire, Vere's proud mouth smiled with ineffable contempt.

'What will you, my love?' said Madame Nelaguine. 'She is frightfully vulgar, but it is a piquante vulgarity. It takes.'

Vere frowned and her lips set close.

'She has made him sink coal shafts in the forest already; *our* forest!'

Madame Nelaguine shrugged her shoulders.

'It is a pity, for the forests. But we dig for salt; it is cleaner, prettier, but I am not sure that is more princely, salt than coal.'

'No Herbert of Mull has ever done it,' said Vere with darkening flashing eyes. 'Not one in all the centuries that we have been on the Northumbrian seaboard, for we were there in the days of Otterbourne and Flodden. No man of them would ever do it. Oh, if you had ever seen that forest! and soon now it will be a blackened, smoking, reeking treeless waste. It is shameful of my cousin Francis.'

'He is in love still, and does what she tells him. My dear, our sex is divided into two

sorts of women—those who always get their own way and those who never get it. Pick-me-up, as they call your cousin's wife in London, is of the fortunate first sort. She is vulgar, ignorant, audacious, uneducated, but she takes, and in her way she is *maîtresse femme.* You have a thousand times more mind, and ten thousand times more character, yet you do not get your own way; you never will get it.'

'I would have lived on beechmast and acorns from the forest trees sooner than have sunk a shaft under one of them,' said Vere unheeding, only thinking of the grand old glades, the deep, still greenery, the mossy haunts of buck and doe, the uplands and the yellow gorze, that were to be delivered over now to the smoke-fiend.

'That I quite believe,' said her sister-in-law. 'But it is just that kind of sentiment in you which will for ever prevent your having influence. You are too lofty; you do not stoop and see the threads in the dust that guide men.'

'For thirteen centuries the forest has been untouched,' answered Vere.

It was an outrage that she could not forgive.

When she first met the Duchess of Mull after her marriage, Fuschia Leach, translated into Her Grace, said across a drawing-room, 'Vera, I am going to dig for that coal. I guess we'll live to make a pile that way.' Vere deigned to give no answer, unless a quick, angry flush, and the instant turning of her back on the new duchess could be called one. The young duke sat between them, awed, awkward and ashamed.

'I will never forgive it,' his cousin said to him later. 'I will never forgive it. She knows no better because she was born so—but you!'

He muttered a commonplace about waste of mineral wealth, and felt a poor creature.

'I think you're quite right to dig,' said Lady Dolly in his ear to console him. 'Quite right to dig; why not? I dare say your wife will make your fortune, and I am sure she ought

if she can, to compensate for her papa, who helps people to "liquor up," and her brothers, who are in the pig-killing trade, pig-killing by machinery; I've seen a picture of it in the papers; the pigs go down a gangway, as we do on to the Channel steamers, and they come up hams and sausages. Won't you have the pig-killers over? They would be quite *dans le métier* at Hurlingham. Of course she tells you to dig, and you do it. Good husbands always do what they're told.'

For Lady Dolly detested all the Herberts, and had no mercy whatever on any one of them; and, in her way, she was a haughty little woman, and though she was shrewd enough to see that in her day aristocracy to be popular must pretend to be democratic, she did not relish any more than any other member of that great family, the connection of its head with the pig-killing brothers down west.

Yet, on the whole, she made herself pleasant to the new duchess, discerning that the lovely Fuschia possessed in reserve an immense retaliating power of being 'nasty'

were she displeased, so that sensible Lady Dolly even went the length of doing what all the rest of the Mull family flatly refused to do—she presented her niece 'on her marriage.'

And Her Grace, who, on her first girlish presentation, when she had first come over 'the pickle-field,' had confessed herself 'flustered,' was, on this second occasion perfectly equal to it; carrying her feathers as if she had been born with them on her head, and bending her bright cheeks over a bouquet in such a manner that all London dropped at her feet. 'If Sam and Saul could see me,' thought the American beauty, hiding a grin with her roses; her memory reverting to the big brothers, at that moment standing above a great tank of pigs' blood, counting the 'dead 'uns' as they were cast in the caldrons.

'It is so very extraordinary. I suppose it is because she is so dreadfully odd,' said Lady Dolly of her daughter to Lady Stoat that spring, on her return from spending Easter in Paris. 'But when we think she has everything she can possibly wish for, that when she goes down the

Bois really nobody else is looked at, that he has actually bought the Roc's egg for her—really, really, it is flying in the face of Providence for her not to be happier than she is. I am sure if at her age I might have spent ten thousand pounds a season on my gowns, I should have been in heaven if they had married me to a Caffre.'

'I never think you did your dear child justice,' said Lady Stoat gently. 'No, I must say you never did. She is very steadfast, you know, and quite out of the common, and not in the least vulgar. Now, if you won't mind my saying it,—because I am sure you do enjoy yourself, but then you are such a dear, *enjouée*, good-natured little creature that you accommodate yourself to anything—to enjoy the present generation one must be a little vulgar. I am an old woman, you know, and look on and see things, and the whole note of this thing is vulgar even when it is at its very best. It has been so ever since the Second Empire.'

'The *dear* Second Empire; you never were just to it,' said Lady Dolly, with the tears

almost rising to her eyes at the thought of all she had used to enjoy in it.

'It was the apotheosis of the vulgar; of the sort of *blague* and shamelessness which made De Morny put an Hortensia on his carriage panels,' said Lady Stoat calmly. 'To have that sort of epoch in an age is like having skunk fur on your clothes; the taint never goes away, and it even gets on to your lace and your cachemires. I am afraid our grandchildren will smell the Second Empire far away into the twentieth century, and be the worse for it.'

'I daresay there will have been a Fourth and a Fifth by then.'

'Collapsed windbags, I dare say. The richest soil always bears the rankest mushrooms. France is always bearing mushrooms. It is a pity. But what I meant was that your Vere has not got the taint of it at all; I fancy she scarcely cares at all about that famous diamond unless it be for its historical associations. I am quite sure she doesn't enjoy being stared at; and I think she very heartily dislikes having

her beauty written about in newspapers, as if she were a mare of Lord Falmouth's or a cow of Lady Pigott's; she is not Second Empire, that's all.'

'Then you mean to say I am vulgar!' said Lady Dolly, with some tartness.

Lady Stoat smiled, a deprecating smile, that disarmed all sufferers, who without it might have resented her honeyed cruelties.

'My dear! I never say rude things; but, if you wish me to be sincere, I confess I think everybody is a little vulgar now, except old women like me, who adhered to the Faubourg while you all were dancing and changing your dresses seven times a day at St. Cloud. There is a sort of vulgarity in the air; it is difficult to escape imbibing it; there is too little reticence, there is too much tearing about; men are not well-mannered, and women are too solicitous to please, and too indifferent how far they stoop in pleasing. It may be the fault of steam; it may be the fault of smoking; it may come from that flood of new people of whom "L'Etrangère" is the scarcely exaggerated sample; but, whatever

it comes from, there it is—a vulgarity that taints everything, courts and cabinets as well as society. Your daughter somehow or other has escaped it, and so you find her odd, and the world thinks her stiff. She is neither; but no dignified long-descended point-lace, you know, will ever let itself be twisted and whirled into a cascade and a *fouillis* like your Brétonne lace that is just the fashion of the hour, and worth nothing. I admire your Vera very greatly; she always makes me think of those dear old stately hotels with their grand gardens in which I saw, in my girlhood, the woman who, in theirs, had known France before '30. Those hotels and their gardens are gone, most of them, and there are stucco and gilt paint in their places. And there are people who think that a gain. I am not one of them.'

'My sweetest Adine,' said Vere's mother pettishly, 'if you admire my child so much, why did you persuade her to marry Sergius Zouroff?'

'To please you, dear,' said Lady Stoat with a glance that cowed Lady Dolly. 'I thought

she would adorn the position; she does adorn it. It is good to see a gentlewoman of the old type in a high place, especially when she is young. When we are older, they don't listen much; they throw against us the *laudator tempori acti*,—they think we are disappointed or embittered. It is good to see a young woman to whom men still have to bow, as they bow to queens, and before whom they do not dare to talk the *langue verte*. She ought to have a great deal of influence.'

'She has none; none whatever. She never will have any,' said Lady Dolly, with a sort of triumph, and added, with the sagacity that sometimes shines out in silly people—'You never influence people if you don't like the things they like; you always look what the boys call a prig. Women hate Vere, perfectly *hate* her, and yet I am quite sure she never did anything to any one of them; for, in her cold way, she is very good-natured. But then she spoils her kind things; the way she does them annoys people. Last winter, while she was at Nice, Olga Zwetchine—you know her, the hand-

some one, her husband was in the embassy over here some time ago—utterly ruined herself at play, pledged everything she possessed, and was desperate; she had borrowed heavens knows what, and lost it all. She went and told Vera. Vera gave her a heap of money *sans se faire prier*, and then ran her pen through the Zwetchine's name on her visiting list. Zouroff was furious. "Let the woman be ruined," he said, "what was it to you; but go on receiving her; she is an ex-ambassadress; she will hate you all your life." Now what do you call that?'

'My friends of the old faubourg would have done the same,' said Lady Stoat, 'only they would have done it without giving the money.'

'I can't imagine why she did give it,' said Lady Dolly. 'I believe she would give to anybody—to Noisette herself, if the creature were in want.'

'She probably knows nothing at all about Noisette.'

'Oh yes, she does. For the Zwetchine, as soon as she had got the money safe, wrote all

about that woman to her, and every other horrid thing she could think of too, to show her gratitude, she said. Gratitude is always such an unpleasant quality, you know; there is always a grudge behind it.'

'And what did she say, or do about Noisette?'

'Nothing; nothing at all. I should never have heard of it, only she tore the Zwetchine letters up, and her maid collected them and pieced them together, and told my maid; you know what maids are. I never have any confidence from Vera. I should never dare to say a syllable to her.'

'Very wise of her; very dignified, not to make a scene. So unlike people now-a-days, too, when they all seem to think it a positive pleasure to get into the law-courts and newspapers.'

'No; she didn't do anything. And now I come to think of it,' said Lady Dolly, with a sudden inspiration towards truthfulness, 'she struck off the Zwetchine's name *after* that letter, very likely; and I dare say never told Zouroff

she had had it, for she is very proud, and very silent, dreadfully so.'

'She seems to me very sensible,' said Lady Stoat. 'I wish my Gwendolen were like her. It is all I can do to keep her from rushing to the lawyers about Birk.'

'Vera is ice,' said Lady Dolly.

'And how desirable that is; how *safe!*' said Lady Stoat, with a sigh of envy and self-pity, for her daughter, Lady Birkenhead, gave her trouble despite the perfect education that daughter had received.

'Certainly safe, so long as it lasts, but not at all popular,' said Lady Dolly, with some impatience. 'They call her the Edelweiss in Paris. Of course it means that she is quite inaccessible. If she were inaccessible in the *right* way, it might be all very well, though the time's gone by for it, and it's always stiff, and nobody is stiff now-a-days; still, it might answer if she were only just exclusive and not—not—so very rude all round.'

'She is never rude; she is cold.'

'It comes to the same thing,' said Lady

Dolly, who hated to be contradicted. 'Everybody sees that they bore her, and people hate you if they think they bore you; it isn't that they care about you, but they fancy you find them stupid. Now, isn't the most popular woman in all Europe that creature I detest, Fuschia Mull? Will you tell me anybody so praised, so petted, so sought after, so raved about? Because she 's a duchess? O, my love, no! You may be a duchess, and you may be a nobody outside your own county, just as that horrid old cat up at Bulmer has always been. Oh, that has nothing to do with it. She is so popular because everybody delights her, and everything is fun to her. She 's as sharp as a needle, but she 's as gay as a lark. I hate her, but you can't be dull where she is. You know the prince always calls her "Pick-me-up." At that fancy fair for the poor Wallacks —whoever the poor Wallacks may be—the whole world was there. Vera had a stall, she loaded it with beautiful things, things much too good, and sat by it, looking like a very grand portrait of Mignard's. She was superb,

exquisite, and she had a bower of orchids, and a carved ivory chair from Hindostan. People flocked up by the hundreds, called out about her beauty, and—went away. She looked so still, so tired, so contemptuous. A very little way off was Fuschia Mull, selling vile tea and tea-cakes, and two-penny cigarettes. My dear, the whole world surged round that stall as if it were mad. Certainly she had a lovely Louis Treize hat on, and a delicious dress, gold brocade with a violet velvet long waistcoat. Her execrable tea sold for a sovereign a cup, and when she kissed her cigarettes they went for five pounds each! Zouroff went up and told his wife: "A brioche there fetches more than your Saxe, and your Sévres, and your orchids," he said. "You don't tempt the people, you frighten them." Then Vera looked at him with that way—she has such a freezing way—and only said: "Would you wish me to kiss the orchids?" Zouroff laughed. "Well, no; you don't do for this thing, I see; you don't know how to make yourself cheap." Now I think he hit exactly on what I mean.

To be liked now-a-days you must make yourself cheap. If you want to sell your cigar you must kiss it.'

'But suppose she has no cigars she wants to sell?'

'You mean she has a great position, and need care for nobody? That is all very well. But if she ever come to grief, see how they will turn and take it out of her!'

'I never said she was wise not to be polite,' pleaded Lady Stoat. 'But as to "coming to grief," as you say, that is impossible. She will always sit in that ivory chair.'

'I dare say; but one never knows, and she is odd. If any day she get very angry with Zouroff, she is the sort of temper to go out of his house in her shift, and leave everything behind her.'

'What a picture!' said Lady Stoat, with a shudder.

Nothing appalled Lady Stoat like the idea of anyone being wrought upon to do anything violent. She would never admit that there could ever be any reason for it, or excuse.

She had been an admirable wife to a bad husband herself, and she could not conceive any woman not considering her position before all such pettier matters as emotions and wrongs.

When her daughter, who was of an impetuous disposition, which even the perfect training she had received had not subdued, would come to her in rage and tears because of the drunkenness or because of the open infidelities of the titled Tony Lumpkin that she had wedded, Lady Stoat soothed her, but hardly sympathised. 'Lead your own life, my love, and don't worry,' she would say. 'Nothing can unmake your position, and no one, except yourself.' When her daughter passionately protested that position was not all that a woman wanted at twenty years old and with a heart not all trained out of her, Lady Stoat would feel seriously annoyed and injured. 'You forget your position,' she would reply. 'Pray, pray do not jeopardise your position. Let your husband go to music-halls and creatures if he must; it is very sad, certainly, very sad. But it only hurts him; it cannot affect your

position.' Farther than that the light she possessed could not take her.

She would not have been disposed to quarrel with the Princess Zouroff, as her own mother did, for not playing the fool at fancy fairs, but she would have thought it horrible, inexcusable, if, under the pressure of any wrong, the affront of infidelity, she had—in Lady Dolly's figure of speech—left her husband's house in her shift.

'Never lose your position,' would have been the text that Lady Stoat would have had written in letters of gold, for all young wives to read, and it was the text on which all her sermons were preached.

Position was the only thing that, like old wine or oak furniture, improved with years. If you had a good position at twenty, at forty you might be a power in the land. What else would wear like that? Not love, certainly, which indeed at all times Lady Stoat was disposed to regard as a malady; a green sickness, inevitable, but, to onlookers, very irritating in its delirious nonsense.

It was neither mere rank nor mere riches that Lady Stoat considered a great position. It was the combination of both, with a power—inalienable except by your own act—to give the tone to those around you; to exclude all who did not accord with your own notions; to be unattainable, untroubled, unruffled; to be a great example to society; metaphorically to move through life with carpet always unrolled before your steps. When you had a position that gave you all this, if you had tact and talent enough to avail yourself of it, what could you by any possibility need more?

Yet her own daughter, and her friend's daughter, had this and both were dissatisfied.

Her own daughter, to her anguish unspeakable, revolted openly and grew vulgar; even grew vulgar; went on the boxes of the four-in-hand-men's coaches, shot and hunted, played in amateur performances before London audiences far from choice; had even been seen at the Crystal Palace; had 'loud' costumes with wonderful waistcoats; and had always a crowd of young men wherever she went. Lady Stoat

honestly would sooner have seen her in her grave.

The Princess Zouroff, who had the very perfection of manner even if she offended people, who knew of her husband's infidelities and said nothing, went coldly and serenely through the world, taking no pleasure in it perhaps, but giving it no power to breathe a breath against her.

'Why was she not my child!' sighed Lady Stoat sadly.

If Lady Stoat could have seen into the soul of Vere, she would have found as little there with which she could have sympathised as she found in her own daughter's tastes for the stage, the drag, and the loud waistcoats.

She could not imagine the price at which Vere's composure was attained; the cost at which that perfect manner, which she admired, was kept unruffled by a sigh or frown. She could not tell that this young life was one of perpetual suffering, of exhausting effort to keep hold on the old faiths and the old principles of childhood amidst a world

which has cast out faith as old-fashioned and foolish, and regards a principle as an affront and an ill-nature. Her own society found the young Princess Vera very cold, unsympathetic, strange; she was chill about fashionable good works, and her grand eyes had a look in them, stern in its sadness, which frightened away both courtiers and enemies. The verdict upon her was that she was unamiable.

The world did not understand her.

'The poor you have always with you,' had been an injunction that, in the days of her childhood, she had been taught to hold sacred.

'The poor you have always with you,' she said to a bevy of great ladies once. 'Christ said so. You profess to follow Christ. How have you the poor with you? The back of their garret, the roof of their hovel, touches the wall of your palace, and the wall is thick. You have dissipations, spectacles, diversions that you call charities; you have a tombola for a famine, you have a dramatic performance for a flood, you have a concert for a fire, you

have a fancy fair for a leprosy. Do you never think how horrible it is, that mockery of woe? Do you ever wonder at revolutions? Why do you not say honestly that you care nothing? You do care nothing. The poor might forgive the avowal of indifference; they will never forgive the insult of affected pity.'

Then the ladies who heard were scandalised, and went to their priests and were comforted, and would not have this young saint preach to them as Chrysostom preached to the ladies of Constantinople.

But Vere had been reared in tender thoughtfulness for the poor. Her grandmother, stern to all others, to the poor was tender.

'Put your second frock on for the Queen, if you like,' she would say to the child; 'but to the poor go in your best clothes or they will feel hurt.' Vere never forgot what was meant in that bidding. Charity in various guises is an intruder the poor see often; but courtesy and delicacy are visitants with which they are seldom honoured.

It is very difficult for a woman who is

young and very rich not to be deceived very often, and many an impostor, no doubt, played his tricks upon her. But she was clear-sighted and much in earnest, and found many whose needs were terrible, and whose lives were noble. The poor of Paris are suspicious, resentful, and apt to be sullen in their independence; but they are often also serious and intelligent, tender of heart, and gay of spirit. Some of them she grew to care for very much, and many of them forgave her for being an aristocrat, and welcomed her for her loveliness and her sympathy. As for herself, she sometimes felt that the only reality life had for her was when she went up to those damp chill attics in the metal roofs, and spoke with those whose bread was bitterness and whose cup was sorrow. Her husband, with some contempt, told her she grew like Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia, but he did not forbid her doing as she pleased. If she were present to drive in the Bois, or ride there before sunset, and afterwards went to dinner, or ball, or reception, as the engagements of

the night might require, he did not exact any more account of her time or ask how her mornings were spent.

'You leave Vera too much alone, terribly too much,' said his sister to him once.

He stared, then laughed.

'Alone? a woman of her rank is never alone. Not a whit more than queens are!'

'I mean you are not with her; you never ask what she does all the day.'

'I suppose her early hours are given to her tailor and her milliner, and the later ones to morning visits,' he answered with a yawn. 'It does not matter what she does. She is a fool in many things, but she will not abuse liberty.'

For, though he had never believed in any woman, he did believe in his wife.

'She will not abuse it yet; no,' thought Madame Nelaguine. 'No, not yet, whilst she is still under the influence of her childish faiths and her fear of God. But after?—after five, six, seven years of the world, of this world into which you have cast her without any armour of

love to protect her—how will it be then? It will not be men's fault if she misuse her liberty; and assuredly it will not be women's. We corrupt each other more than men corrupt us.'

Aloud the Princess Nelaguine merely said, 'You allow her to be friends with Jeanne de Sonnaz?'

Zouroff laughed again and frowned.

'All women in the same set see one another day and night. Who is to help that?'

'But——'

'Be reasonable,' he said roughly. 'How can I say to my wife, "Do not receive the Duchesse de Sonnaz." All Paris would be convulsed, and Jeanne herself a demoniac. Good heavens! Where do you get all these new scruples? Is it your contact with Vera?'

'Your contact with her does not teach them to you,' said his sister coldly. 'Oh, our world is vile enough, that I know well, but somewhere or other I think it might keep a little conscience, for exceptional circumstances, and so might you.'

'Do not talk nonsense. I cannot tell Jeanne not to know my wife, or my wife not to know Jeanne. They must take their chance; there is nothing exceptional; every man does the same.'

'Yes; we are very indecent,' said Madame Nelaguine quietly. 'We do not admit it, but we are.'

Her brother shrugged his shoulders to express at once acquiescence and indifference.

In one of the visits that her charities led his wife to make she heard one day a thing that touched her deeply. Her horses knocked down a girl of fifteen who was crossing the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. The girl was not hurt, though frightened. She was taken into the Hotel Zouroff, and Vere returned to the house to attend to her. As it proved, the child, when the faintness of her terror had passed, declared herself only a little bruised, smiled and thanked her, and said she would go home; she wanted nothing. She was a freckled, ugly, bright-looking little thing, and was carrying some of those artificial

flowers with which so many girls of Paris gain their daily bread. Her name was Félicie Martin, and she was the only child of her father, and her mother was dead.

The following day the quiet little *coupé* that took Vere on her morning errands, found its way into a narrow but decent street in the Batignolles, and the Princess Zouroff inquired for the Sieur Martin.

Vere bade her men wait below, and went up the stairs to the third floor. The house was neat, and was let to respectable people of the higher class of workers. In her own world she was very proud, but it was not the pride that offends the working classes, because it is dignity and not arrogance, and is simple and natural, thinking nothing of rank though much of race, and far more still of character.

'May I come in?' she said in her clear voice, which had always so sad an accent in it, but for the poor was never cold. 'Will you allow me to make myself quite sure that your daughter is none the worse for that accident,

and tell you myself how very sorry I was? Russian coachmen are always so reckless.'

'But, madame, it is too much honour!' said a little, fair man who rose on her entrance, but did not move forward. 'Forgive me, madame, you are as beautiful as you are good; so I have heard from my child, but alas! I cannot have the joy to see such sunlight in my room. Madame will pardon me— I am blind.'

'Blind?'—the word always strikes a chill to those who hear it; it is not a very rare calamity, but it is the one of all others which most touches bystanders, and is most quickly realised. He was a happy-looking little man, nevertheless, though his blue eyes were without light in them gazing into space unconsciously; the room was clean, and gay, and sweet-smelling, with some pretty vases and prints and other simple ornaments, and in the casement some geraniums and heliotrope.

'Yes, I am blind,' he said cheerfully. 'Will Madame la Princesse kindly be seated? My child is at her workshop. She will be so glad and proud. She has talked of nothing but

madame ever since yesterday. Madame's beauty, madame's goodness;—ah yes, the mercy of it! I am always afraid for my child in the streets, but she is not afraid for herself; she is little, but she is brave. It is too much kindness for Madame la Princesse to have come up all this height, but madame is good; one hears it in her voice. Yes, my child makes flowers for the great Maison Justine. Our angel did that for us. She is my only child, yes. Her dear mother died at her birth. I was fourth clarionet at the Opéra Comique at that time.'

'But you can play still?'

'Ah no, madame. My right arm is paralysed. It was one day in the forest at Vincennes. Félicie was ten years old. I thought to give her a Sunday in the wood. It was in May. We were very happy, she and I running after one another, and pulling the hawthorn when no one looked. All in a moment a great storm came up and burst over us where we were in the midst of the great trees. The lightning struck my eyes and my right shoulder. Ah the

poor, poor child! . . . But madame must excuse me; I am tiresome——'

'It interests me; go on.'

'I fell into great misery, madame. That is all. No hospital could help me. The sight was gone, and my power to use my right arm was gone too. I could not even play my clarionet in the streets as blind men do. I had saved a little, but not much. Musicians do not save, any more than painters. I had never earned very much either. I grew very very poor. I began to despair. I had to leave my lodging, my pretty little rooms where the child was born and where my wife had died; I went lower and lower, I grew more and more wretched; a blind, useless man with a little daughter. And I had no friends; no one; because, myself, I came from Alsace, and the brother I had there was dead, and our parents too had been dead long, long before; they had been farmers. Madame, I saw no hope at all. I had not a hope on earth, and Félicie was such a little thing she could do nothing. But I fatigue madame?'

'Indeed no. Pray go on, and tell me how it is that you are so tranquil now.'

'I am more than tranquil; I am happy, Princess. That is his doing. My old employers all forgot me. They had so much to think of; it was natural. I was nobody. There were hundreds and thousands could play as well as I had ever played. One day when I was standing in the cold, hungry, with my little girl hungry too, I heard them saying how the young singer Corrèze had been engaged at fifty thousand francs a night for the season. I went home and I made the child write a letter to the young man. I told him what had happened to me, and I said, "You are young and famous, and gold rains on you like dew in midsummer; will you remember that we are very wretched? If you said a word to my old directors—you—they would think of me." I sent the letter. I had often played in the orchestra when the young man was first turning the heads of all Paris. I knew he was gay and careless; I had not much hope.'

'Well?' Her voice had grown soft and

eager; the man was blind, and could not see the flush upon her face.

'Well, a day or two went by, and I thought the letter was gone in the dust. Then he came to me, he himself, Corrèze. I knew his perfect voice as I heard it on the stairs. You can never forget it once you have heard. He had a secretary even then, but he had not left my letter to the secretary. He came like the angel Raphael whose name he bears.'

Vere's eyes filled; she thought of the white cliffs by the sea, of the sweetbriar hedge, and the song of the thrush.

'But I tire madame,' said the blind man. 'He came like an angel. There is no more to be said. He made believe to get me a pension from the opera, but I have always thought that it is his own money, though he will not own to it; and as my child had a talent for flower-making he had her taught the trade, and got her employed later on by the Maison Justine. He sent me that china, and he sends me those flowers, and he comes sometimes himself. He has sung here—*here!*—only just to make my

darkness lighter. And I am not the only one, madame. There are many, many, many who if they ever say their prayers, should never forget Corrèze.'

Vere was silent, because her voice failed her.

'You have heard Corrèze, madame, of course, many times?' asked the blind man. 'Ah, they say he has no religion and is careless as the butterflies are; to me he has been as the angels. I should have been in Bicêtre or in my grave but for him.'

The girl at that moment entered.

'Félicie,' said the Sieur Martin, 'give the Princess a piece of heliotrope. Oh, she has forests of heliotrope in her conservatories, that I am sure, but she will accept it; it is the flower of Corrèze.'

Vere took it and put it amidst the old lace at her breast.

'You have Félicie Martin amongst your girls I think?' said Vere to the head of the Maison Justine a little later.

The principal of that fashionable house, a handsome and clever woman, assented.

'Then let her make some flowers for me,' added Vere. 'Any flowers will do. Only will you permit me to pay her through you very well for them; much better for them than they are worth?'

'Madame la Princesse,' said the other with a smile, 'the little Martin cannot make such flowers as you would wear. I employ her, but I never use her flowers, never. I have to deceive her; it would break her heart if she knew that I burn them all. The poor child is willing, but she is very clumsy. She cannot help it. Madame will understand it is a secret of my house; a very little harmless secret, like a little mouse. Corrèze, madame knows whom I mean, the great singer?—Corrèze came to me one day with his wonderful smile, and he said, "There is a blind man and he has a little girl who wants to make flowers. Will you have her taught, madame, and allow me to pay for her lessons?" I allowed him. Six months afterwards I said, "M. Corrèze, it is all of no use. The child is clumsy. When once they have fingers like hers it is of no use." Then he

laughed. "It ought to be difficult to make artificial flowers. I wish it were impossible. It is a blasphemy. But I want to make the girl believe she earns money. Will you employ her, burn the flowers, and draw the money from my account at Rothschild's?' And I did it to please him and I do it still; poor little clumsy ugly thing that she is, she fancies she works for the Maison Justine! It is compromising to me. I said so to M. Corrèze. He laughed and said to me, "*Ma chère*, when it is a question of a blind man and a child we must even be compromised, which, no doubt, is very terrible." He is always so gay, M. Corrèze, and so good. If the child were Venus he would never take advantage of maintaining her, never, madame. Ah, he is an angel, that beautiful Corrèze. And he can laugh like a boy; it does one good to hear his laugh. It is so sweet. My poor Justine used to say to me, "Marie, hypocrites weep, and you cannot tell their tears from those of saints; but no bad man ever laughed sweetly yet." And it is true, very true; Madame la Princesse will forgive my garrulity.'

When she went down to her carriage the world did not seem so dark.

There was beauty in it, as there were those flowers blooming in that common street. The little picture of the father and daughter, serene and joyous in their humble chamber, in the midst of the gay, wild, ferocious riot of Paris, seemed like a little root of daisies blooming white amidst a battle-field.

That night she went to her box at the Grand Opera, and sat as far in the shadow as she could and listened to Corrèze in the part of Gennaro.

'He does not forget that blind man,' she thought. 'Does he ever remember me?'

For she could never tell.

From the time she had entered Paris she had longed, yet dreaded to meet, face to face, Corrèze.

She saw him constantly in the street, in the Bois, in society, but he never approached her; she never once could be even sure that he recognised or remembered her. She heard people say that Corrèze was more difficult of

access, more disinclined to accept the worship of society, than he had been before, but she could not tell what his motive might be; she could not believe that she had any share in his thoughts. His eyes never once met hers but what they glanced away again rapidly, and without any gleam of recognition. Again and again in those great salons where he was a petted idol, she was close beside him, but she could never tell that he remembered her. Perhaps his life was so full, she thought; after all, what was one summer morning that he should cherish its memory?

Often in the conversations that went on around her, she heard his successes, his inconstancies, his passions of the past, slight or great, alluded to, laughed over, or begrudged. Often, also, she heard of other things; of some great generosity to a rival, some great aid to an aspirant of his art, some magnificent gift to a college made by the famous singer. Or, on the other hand, of some captiousness as of a too spoilt child, some wayward caprice shown to the powers of the State by the powers of genius,

some brilliant lavishness of entertainment or of fancy. When she heard these things her heart would beat, her colour would change; they hurt her, she could not have told why.

Meantime the one solace of her life was to see his genius and its triumphs, its plenitude and its perfect flower. Her box at the Grand Opera was the only one of the privileges of her position which gave her pleasure. Her knowledge of music was deep and had been carefully cultured, and her well-known love for it made her devotion to the opera pass unremarked. Seldom could the many engagements made for her let her hear any one opera from its overture to the close. But few nights passed without her being in her place, sitting as far in the shadow as she could, to hear at least one act or more of 'Fidelio' of 'Lucia,' of the 'Prophète,' of the 'Zauberflöte,' of 'Faust,' or of the 'Il Trovatore.' She never knew or guessed that the singer watched for her fair-haired head amidst the crowded house, as a lover watches for the rising of the evening planet that shall light him to his love.

She saw him in the distance a dozen times a week, she saw him, not seldom, at the receptions of great houses, but she never was near enough to him to be sure whether he had really forgotten her, or whether he had only affected oblivion.

Corrèze, for his own part, avoided society as much as he could, and alleged that to sing twice or three times a week was as much as his strength would allow him to do, if he wished to be honest and give his best to his impresario. But he was too popular, too much missed when absent, and too great a favourite with great ladies to find retirement in the midst of Paris possible. So that, again and again, it was his fortune to see the child he had sung to on the Norman cliffs announced to the titled crowds as Madame la Princesse Zouroff. It always hurt him. On the other hand he was always glad when, half-hidden behind some huge fan or gigantic bouquet, he could see the fair head of Vere in the opera-house.

When he sang he sang to her.

'How is it you do not know Princess Vera?' said many of his friends to him; for he never asked to be presented to her.

'I think she would not care to know an artist,' he would say. 'Why should she? She is at the height of fame and fortune, and charm and beauty; what would she want with the homage of a singing-mime? She is very exquisite; but you know I have my pride; *la probité des pauvres, et la grandeur des rois*; I never risk a rebuff.'

And he said it so lightly that his friends believed him, and believed that he had a fit of that reserve which very often made him haughtier and more difficult to persuade than any Roi Soleil of the lyric stage had ever been.

'I am very shy,' he would say sometimes, and everybody would laugh at him. Yet, in a way, it was true; he had many sensitive fancies, and all in his temperament that was tender, spiritual, and romantic had centred itself in that innocent emotion which had never been love, which was as fantastic as Dante's, and almost as baseless as Keats's, and was therefore

all the more dear to him because so unlike the too easy and too material passions which had been his portion in youth.

'It can do her no harm,' he would think, 'and it goes with me like the angel that the poets write of, that keeps the door of the soul.'

It was a phantasy, he told himself, but then the natural food of artists was phantasies of all kinds; and so this tenderness, this regret, went with him always through the gay motley of his changeful days, as the golden curl of some lost love, or some dead child, may lie next the heart of a man all the while that he laughs and talks, and dines, and drives, and jests, and yawns in the midst of the world.

'It can do her no harm,' he said, and so he never let his eyes meet hers, and she could never tell whether he ever remembered that Vera Zouroff had once been Vere Herbert.

And the weeks and the months rolled on their course, and Corrèze was always the Roi Soleil of his time, and Vere became yet of greater beauty, as her face and form reached

their full perfection. Her portraits by great painters, her busts by great sculptors, her costumes by great artists, were the themes of the public press; the streets were filled to see her go by in the pleasure-capital of the world; amongst her diamonds the famous jewel of tragic memories and historic repute that was called the roc's egg shone on her white breast as if she had plucked a planet from the skies. No day passed but fresh treasures in old jewels, old wares, old gold and silver from the sales of the Hôtel Drouot, were poured into her rooms with all the delicate charm about them that comes from history and tradition. Had she any whim, she could indulge it; any taste, she could gratify it; any fancy, she could execute it; and yet one day when she saw a picture in the Salon of a slave-girl standing with rope-bound wrists and fettered ankles, amidst the lustrous stuffs and gems of the harem, surrounded by the open coffers and glittering stones and chains of gold in which her captors were about to array her nude and trembling limbs, she

looked long at it, and said to the master of oriental art who had painted it, 'Did you need to go to the East for *that*?'

She bought the picture, and had it hung in her bedchamber in Paris; where it looked strange and startling against the pink taffetas, and the silver embroideries of the wall.

'That is not in your usual good taste,' said her husband, finding that the painting ill agreed with the decorations of the room.

Vere looked at him, and answered: 'It suits any one of my rooms.'

He did not think enough of the matter to understand; the picture hung there amidst the silver Cupids, and the embroidered apple-blossoms of the wall.

'A painful picture, a horrible picture, like all Gerôme's,' said her mother before it once.

A very cold smile came on Vere's mouth.

'Yes,' she said simply, 'we have no degradation like that in Europe, have we?'

Lady Dolly coloured, turned away, and asked if Fantin had designed those charming wreaths of apple-blossoms and amorini.

But it was very seldom that the bitterness, and scorn, and shame, that were in her found any such expression as in the purchase of the 'Slave of the Harem.' She was almost always quite tranquil, and very patient under the heavy burden of her days.

All the bitterness and humiliation of her heart she choked down into silence, and she continued to live as she had done hitherto, without sympathy and in an utter mental isolation. She felt that all she had been taught to respect was ridiculous in the eyes of those who surrounded her; she saw all that she had been accustomed to hold in horror as sin made subject for jest and for intrigue; she saw that all around her, whilst too polite to deride the belief and the principles that guided her, yet regarded them as the cobwebs and chimeræ of childhood; she saw that the women of her world, though they clung to priests, and in a way, feared an offended heaven—when they recollected it—yet were as absolutely without moral fibre and mental cleanliness as any naked creatures of Pacific isles sacrificing

to their obscene gods. All that she saw; but it did not change her.

She was faithful, not because his merit claimed it, but because her duty made such faith the only purity left to her. She was loyal, not because his falseness was ever worthy of it, but because her nature would not let her be other than loyal to the meanest thing that lived.

Chastity was to her as honour to the gentleman, as courage to the soldier. It was not a robe embroidered and worn for mere parade, and therefore easy to be lifted in the dark by the first audacious hand that ruffled it.

'*On se console toujours*, we know,' her sister-in-law thought, who watched her keenly. 'Still, there is an exception now and then to that rule as to any other, and she is one of those exceptions. It is strange; generally the great world is like æther, or any other dram-drinking; tasted once, it is sought for more and more eagerly every time, and ends in becoming an indispensable intoxication. But nothing intoxicates her, and so nothing con-

soles her. I believe she does not care in the least for being one of the very few perfectly lovely women in Europe. I believe her beauty is almost distasteful and despicable to her, because it brought about her bondage; and although it is an exaggerated way of looking at such things, she is right; she was bought, quite as barbarously as Gerôme's slave. Only were she anybody else she would be reconciled by now—or be revenged. The only time I ever see her look in the least happy is at the opera, and there she seems as if she were dreaming; and once, at Svir, when we were driving over the plains in the snow, and they said the wolves were behind us—then she looked for the moment all brilliancy and courage; one would have said she was willing to feel the wolves' breath on her throat. But in the world she is never like that. What other women find excitement to her is monotony. Pleasure does not please her, vanity does not exist in her, and intrigue does not attract her; some day love will.'

And then Madame Nelaguine would pull the

little curls of her perruque angrily and light her cigar, and sit down to the piano and compose her nerves with Chopin.

'As for Sergius he deserves nothing,' she would mutter, as she followed the dreamy intricate melodies of the great master.

But then it was not for her to admit that to anyone, and much less was it for her to admit it to his wife. Like most great ladies, she thought little of a sin, but she had a keen horror of a scandal, and she was afraid of the future, very afraid of it.

'If she were not a pearl what vengeance she would take!' she thought again and again, when the excesses and indecencies of her brother's career reached her ears.

For she forgot that she understood those as the one most outraged by them was very slow to do.

Vere still dwelt within the citadel of her own innocence, as within the ivory walls of an enchanted fortress. Little by little the corruption of life flowed in to her and surrounded her like a fœtid moat, but, though

it approached her it did not touch her, and often she did not even know that it was near. What she did perceive filled her with a great disgust, and her husband laughed at her.

In these short months of her life in Paris she felt as though she had lived through centuries. Ten years in the old grey solitude of Bulmer would not have aged her morally and mentally as these brief months of the riot of society had done. She had drunk of the cup of knowledge of good and of evil, and, though she had drunk with sinless lips, she could not entirely escape the poison the cup held.

She hated the sin of the world, she hated the sensuality, the intrigue, the folly, the insincerity, the callousness of the life of society, yet the knowledge of it was always with her like a bitter taste in the mouth.

It hurt her unceasingly; it aged her like the passing of many years.

In the beginning of the time she had tried to get some threads of guidance, some words of counsel, from the man who was her husband,

and who knew the world so well. The answers of Sergius Zouroff left her with a heavier heart and a more bitter taste. The chill cynicism, the brutal grossness, of his experiences tore and hurt the delicate fibres of her moral being, as the poisons and the knife of the vivisector tear and burn the sensitive nerves of the living organism that they mutilate.

He did not intend to hurt her, but it seemed to him that her ignorance made her ridiculous. He pulled down the veils and mufflers in which the vices of society mask themselves, and was amused to see her shrink from the nude deformity.

His rough, bold temper had only one weakness in it; he had a nervous dread of being made to look absurd. He thought the innocence and coldness of Vere made him look so.

'They will take me for a *mari amoureux*,' he thought; and Madame de Sonnaz laughed, and told him the same thing fifty times a week. He began to grow impatient of his wife's unconsciousness of all that went on around her, and enlightened her without scruple.

He sat by her, and laughed at Judic and at Théo, and was angry with her that she looked grave and did not laugh; he threw the last new sensation in realistic literature on to her table, and bade her read it, or she would look like a fool when others talked. When a royal prince praised her too warmly, and she resented it, he was annoyed with her. 'You do not know how to take the world,' he said impatiently. 'It is myself that you make ridiculous; I do not aspire to be thought the jealous husband of the theatres, running about with a candle and crying *aux voleurs!*'

When she came to know of the vices of certain great ladies who led the fashion and the world, she asked him if what was said were true.

He laughed.

'Quite true, and a great deal that is never said, and that is worse, is as true too.'

'And you wish me to know them? to be friends with them?' she asked in her ignorance.

He swore a little, and gave her a con-

temptuous caress, as to a dog that is importuning.

'Know them? Of course; you must always know them. They are the leaders of society. What is their life to you or anybody? It is their husbands' affair. You must be careful as to women's position, but you need not trouble yourself about their character.'

'Then nothing that anyone does, matters?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'It depends on how the world takes it. You have a proverb in English about the man who may steal a horse and the man who must not look at the halter. The world is very capricious; it often says nothing to the horse-stealer, it often pillories the person that looks at the halter. You are not in it to redress its caprices. All you need be careful about is to know the right persons.'

'The people that may steal the horses?' said Vere with the faint, fine smile that had no mirth in it, and was too old for her years; the smile that alone had ever come on her lips since her marriage.

'The people that may steal the horses,' said Zouroff with a short laugh, not heeding her smile nor what seed his advice might sow.

When he had left her that day she went into her bed-chamber and sat down before Gerôme's 'Slave for the Harem.'

'The men of the east are better than these,' she thought. 'The men of the east do veil their women and guard them.'

What could he say, what reproach could he make, if she learned her lesson from his teaching, and learned it too well for his honour?

A note was lying on her table from a great prince whom all the world of women loved to praise, and languished to be praised by; a note written by himself, the first initiatory phrases of an adoration that only asked one smile from her to become passion. Such power of vengeance lay for her in it as there lies power of destruction in the slender, jewel-like head of the snake.

She had only to write a word—name an hour—and Sergius Zouroff would taste the fruit of his counsels.

The thought, which was not temptation because it was too cold, glided into her mind, and, for the moment, looked almost sweet to her because it seemed so just—that sad, wild justice which is all that any revenge can be at its best.

She took the note and let it lie on her lap; the note that compromised a future king. She felt as if all her youth were dying in her; as if she were growing hard, and cruel, and soulless. What use were honour, and cleanliness, and dignity? Her husband laughed at them; the world laughed at them. Nothing mattered. No one cared.

The voice of one of her maids roused her, asking, 'Is there any answer from Madame to Monseigneur?'

Vere lifted her eyes, like one who wakes from a feverish sleep. She pushed her hair back with a quick gesture and rose.

'No; none,' she answered curtly; and she took the note, and lighted a match, and burned it.

The slight cold smile came on her face.

'After all,' she thought, 'there is no merit in virtue, when sin would disgust one. I suppose the world is right to be capricious in its award. Since it is only a matter of temperament it is nothing very great to be guiltless. If one like one's soul clean, like one's hands, it is only a question of personal taste. There is no right and no wrong—so they say.'

And her eyes filled, and her heart was heavy; for, to the young and noble, there is no desert so dreary to traverse as the vast waste of the world's indifference. They would be strong to combat, they would be brave to resist, but in that sickly sea of sand they can only faint and sink and cease to struggle.

It is harder to keep true to high laws and pure instincts in modern society than it was in days of martyrdom. There is nothing in the whole range of life so dispiriting and so unnerving as a monotony of indifference. Active persecution and fierce chastisement are tonics to the nerves; but the mere weary conviction that no one cares, that no one notices, that

there is no humanity that honours, and no deity that pities, is more destructive of all higher effort than any conflict with tyranny or with barbarism.

Vere saw very well that if she stooped and touched the brink of vice—if she lent her ear to amorous compliment that veiled dishonour—if she brought herself to the level of the world she lived in, women would love her better, and her husband honour her none the less.

What would he care ?

Perhaps he would not have accepted absolute dishonour, but all the temptations that led to it he let strew her path in all the various guises of the times.

That night there was a great costume ball at one of the legations. It had been talked of for months, and was to be the most brilliant thing of this kind that Paris had seen for many seasons. All the tailors of fashion, and all the famous painters of the day, had alike been pressed into the service of designing the most correct dresses of past epochs, and many dusty chronicles and miniatures in vellum in

old châteaux in the country, and old libraries in the city, had been disturbed, to yield information and to decide disputes.

The Prince and Princess Zouroff were among the latest to arrive. He wore the dress of his ancestor in the time of Ivan II., a mass of sables and of jewels. She, by a whim of his own, was called the Ice-spirit, and diamonds and rock crystals shone all over her from head to foot. Her entrance was the sensation of the evening; and as he heard the exclamations that awarded her the supreme place of beauty where half the loveliness of Europe had been assembled, that vanity of possession which is the basest side of passion revived in him, and made his sluggish pulses beat at once with the miser's and the spendthrift's pleasure.

'Yes, you are right; she is really very beautiful,' whispered Jeanne de Sonnaz in his ear. 'To represent Ice it is not necessary to have *chien*.'

Zouroff frowned; he was never pleased with being reminded of things that he said himself.

The duchesse herself had *chien* enough for twenty women. She called herself a Sorceress, and was all in red, a brilliant, poppy-like, flame-like, Mephistophelian red, with her famous rubies, and many another jewel, winking like wicked little eyes all over her, while a narrow Venetian mask of black hid her ugliest features, and let her blazing eyes destroy their worlds.

As a pageant the great ball was gorgeous and beautiful; as a triumph few women ever knew one greater than that night was to Vere. Yet the hours were tiresome to her. When her eyes had once rested on the pretty picture that the splendid crowd composed, she would willingly have gone away. She felt what the easterns call an asp at her heart. The barrenness and loneliness of her life weighed on her; and it was not in her nature to find solace in levity and consolation in homage. Others might do so and did do so; she could not.

'Madame, what can you want to be content?' said an old wit to her. 'You have rendered every man envious and every woman

unhappy. Surely that is a paradise for you, from which you can look down smiling in scorn at our tears?'

Vere smiled, but not with scorn.

'I should be sorry to think I made anyone unhappy. As for my success, as you call it, they stare at the diamonds, I think. There are too many, perhaps.'

'Madame, no one looks at your diamonds,' said the old beau. 'There are diamonds enough elsewhere in the rooms to cover an Indian temple. You are wilfully cruel. But ice never moved yet for mortals.'

'Am I really ice?' thought Vere, as she sat amidst the changing groups that bent before her, and hung on her words. She did not care for any of them.

They found her unusually beautiful, and thronged about her. Another year it would be some one else; some one probably utterly unlike her. What was the worth of that?

There are tempers which turn restive before admiration, to which flattery is tiresome, and to which a stare seems impertinence. This

was her temper, and the great world did not change it.

She moved slowly through the rooms with the roc's egg gleaming above her breast, and all the lesser stones seeming to flash sunrays from snow as she moved, while she held a fan of white ostrich feathers between her and her worshippers, and her train was upheld by two little De Sonnaz boys dressed as the pole star and the frost.

Her very silence, her defect usually to society, suited her beauty and her name that night; she seemed to have the stillness, the mystery, the ethereality of the Arctic night.

'One grows cold as you pass, madame,' whispered the great prince whom she had not answered that day; 'cold with despair.'

She made him a deep curtsey. She scarcely heard. Her eyes had a misty brilliancy in them; she had forgotten his letter. She was wondering if her life would be always like this ball, a costly and empty pageant—and nothing more.

Into the crowd there came at that moment

a Venetian figure with a lute. His clothes were copied from those of the famous fresco of Battista Zelotti; he looked like Giorgione living once more. Some great ladies, safe in the defence of their masks, were pelting him with blossoms and bon-bons. He was laughing, and defending himself with a gold caduceus that he had stolen from a friend who was a Mercury. He was surrounded by a maze of colours and flowers and white arms. He was hurrying onward, but a personage too great to be gainsaid or avoided called out to him as he passed: 'My friend, what use is your lute since its chords are silent?'

'Monseigneur,' answered the Jouer-du-luth, 'like the singer who bears it, it has a voice never dumb for you.'

They were in a long gallery away from the ball-room; the windows opened on the lamplit garden; the walls were tapestried; figures of archers and pages and ladies worked in all the bright fair colours of the Gobelin looms; there was a gilded estrade that opened on to a marble terrace, that in its turn led to lawns,

cedar-circled, and with little fountains springing up in the light and shadow.

The Venetian lute-player moved a little backward, and leaned against the gilt railing, with his back to the garden and the sky. He touched a chord or two, sweet and far-reaching, seeming to bring on their sigh all the sweet dead loves of the old dead ages. Then he sang to a wild melody that came from the Tchiganes, and that he had learnt round their camp-fires on Hungarian plains at night, while the troops of young horses had scoured by through the gloom, affrighted by the flame and song. He sang the short verse of Heine, that has all the woe of two lives in eight lines:

Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam
Im Norden auf kahler Höh':
Ihn schläfert; mit weisser Decke
Umhüllen ihn Eis und Schnee.

Er träumt von einer Palme,
Die fern im Morgenland
Einsam und schweigend trauert
Auf brennender Felsenwand.

As the first notes touched the air, Vere looked for the first time at the lute-player—she

saw in him Corrèze. As for himself, he had seen her all night; had seen nothing else even while he had laughed, and jested, and paid his court to others.

He too had felt chill as she passed.

And he sang the song of Heine; of the love of the palm and the pine. The royal prince had, with his own hands, silently pushed a low chair towards Vere. She sat there and listened, with her face to the singer and the illumined night.

It was a picture of Venice.

The lute-player leaned against the golden balustrade; the silver of falling water and shining clouds were behind him; around against the hues of the Gobelins stood the groups of maskers, gorgeous and sombre as figures of the Rénaissance. The distant music of the ball-room sounded like the echoes of a far-off chorus, and did not disturb the melody of the song, that hushed all laughter and all whispers, and held the idlest and the noisiest in its charm.

'Give us more, O nightingale;' said the

great prince. 'Son of Procris! I wish we were in the old times of tyranny that I could imprison you close to me all your life in a golden cage.'

'In a cage I should sing not a note, monseigneur. They are but bastard nightingales that sing imprisoned,' said Corrèze.

All the while he did not look at Vere directly once, yet he saw nothing except that fair, cold, grave face, and the cold lustre of the diamonds that were like light all over her.

'Sing once more or recite,' said the prince caressingly. 'Sing once more and I will reward you; I will bring you into the light of the midnight sun, and after that you will never bear the glare of the common day.'

'Is that reward, monseigneur? To be made to regret all one's life?' said Corrèze.

And where he still leaned against the rail, with the moonlit and lamplit gardens behind him, he struck a chord or two lingeringly on his lute as Stradella might have struck them under the shadow of St. Mark, and recited the 'Nuit de Mai' of Alfred de Musset:

Poète, prends ton luth . . . .
Le printemps nait ce soir . . . .

The 'Nuit d'Octobre' is more famous because it has been more often recited by great actors; but the 'Nuit de Mai' is perhaps still finer, and is more true to the temper and the destiny of poets.

All the sweet intoxication of the spring-tide at evening, when '*le vin de la jeunesse fermente cette nuit dans les veines de Dieu*' is but the prelude to the terrible struggle that has its symbol in the bleeding bird dying before the empty ocean and the desert shore, having rent its breast and spent its blood in vain.

The superb peroration, which closes one of the noblest and most sustained flights of imagery that any poet of any nation has ever produced, rolled through the silence of the room in the magnificent melody of a voice, tuned alike by nature and by art to the highest expression of human feeling and of human eloquence.

Then his voice dropped low and stole, like a sigh of exhaustion, through the hush around

him, in the answer of the poet; the answer that the heart of every artist gives soon or late to Fate.

O muse, spectre insatiable,
Ne m'en demande pas si long,
L'homme n'écrit rien sur le sable
À l'heure où passe l'aquilon.
J'ai vu le temps où ma jeunesse
Sur vos lèvres était sans cesse,
Prête à chanter comme un oiseau;
Mais j'ai souffert un dur martyre.
Et le moins que j'en pourrais dire,
Si je l'essayais sur ma lyre,
La briserait comme un roseau.

When the words sank into silence, the silence remained unbroken. The careless, the frivolous, the happy, the cynical, were all alike smitten into a sudden pain, a vague regret, and, for that passing moment, felt the pang the poet feels, always, till death comes to him.

Two great tears rolled down the cheeks of the loveliest woman there, and fell on the great diamonds. When the prince, who had shaded his eyes with his hand, looked up, the lute-player bowed low to him and glided through the crowd.

'And I was just about to present him to

the Princess Zouroff,' said the royal personage, slightly annoyed and astonished. 'Well, one must pardon his caprices, for we have no other like him; and perhaps his judgment is true. One who can move us like that should not, immediately on our emotion, speak to us as a mere mortal in compliment or commonplace. The artist, like the god, should dwell unseen sometimes. But I envy him if I forgive him.'

For he looked at the dimmed eyes of Vere.

CHAPTER XVI.

On the day following Corrèze left Paris to fulfil his London engagements; it was the beginning of May.

When his name disappeared from the announcements, and his person from the scenes of the Grand Opéra, then, and then alone, Vere began to realise all that those nights at the lyric theatre had been in her life.

When she ceased to hear that one perfect voice, the whole world seemed mute. Those few hours in each week had gone so far to solace her for the weariness, the haste, the barren magnificence, and the tiresome adulation of her world; had done so much to give

her some glimpse of the ideal life, some echo of lost dreams, some strength to bear disillusion and disgust.

The utter absence of vanity in her made her incapable of dreaming that Corrèze avoided her because he remembered only too well. She fully thought he had forgotten her. What was a morning by the sea, with a child, in the over-full life of a man foremost in art and in pleasure, consecrated at once to the Muses and the world? She was quite sure he had forgotten her. Even as he had recited the 'Nuit de Mai' his eyes had had no recognition in them. So she thought.

This error made her memory of him tender, innocent, and wistful as a memory of the dead, and softened away all alarm for her from the emotion that possessed her.

He was nothing to her—nothing—except a memory; and she was not even that to him.

Paris became very oppressive to her.

That summer Prince Zouroff, by imperial command, returned to his estate in Russia, to

complete the twelve months' residence which had been commanded him.

They were surrounded by a large house party wherever they resided, and were never alone. Vere fulfilled the social duties of her high station with grace and courtesy, but he found her too cold and too negligent in society, and reproached her continually for some indifference to punctilio, some oblivion of precedence.

Neither her mind nor her heart was with these things. All of them seemed to her so trivial and so useless; she had been born with her mind and her heart both framed for greater force and richer interest than the pomp of etiquette and ceremonial, the victories of precedence and prestige.

They had made her a great lady, a woman of the world, a court beauty, but they could not destroy in her the temper of the studious and tender-hearted child who had read Greek with her dogs about her under the old trees of Bulmer Chase. She had ceased to study because she was too weary, and she strove to

steel and chill her heart because its tenderness could bring her no good; yet she could not change her nature. The world was always so little to her; her God and the truth were so much. She had been reared in the old fashion and she remained of it.

In the gorgeous routine of her life in Russia she always heard in memory the echo of the Nuit de Mai.

A great lassitude and hopelessness came over her, which there was no one to rouse and no one to dispel. Marriage could never bring her aught better than it brought her already—a luxurious and ornamented slavery; and maternity could bring her no consolation, for she knew very well that her children would be dealt with as tyrannically as was her life.

They remained that winter in Russia. The Duke and Duchesse de Sonnaz came there for a little time, and the Duchesse Jeanne wore out her silver skates at the midnight fêtes upon the ice, a miracle of daring and agility, in her favourite crimson colours, with her

sparkling and ugly face beaming under a hood of fur.

'Why does one never tire of *you*?' Zouroff muttered, as he waltzed with her over the Neva in one of the most gorgeous fêtes of the winter season.

Madame Jeanne laughed.

'Because I am ugly, perhaps, or because, as you said once, because, *j'ai le talent de m'encanailler*. But then, so many have that.'

He said nothing, but as he felt her wheel and dart with the swiftness of a swallow, elastic and untiring as though her hips were swung on springs of steel, he thought to himself that it was because she never tired herself. '*Elle se grise si bien*,' he said of her when he had resigned her to an officer of the guard, that night. To *se griser* with drink, or with play, or with folly, or with politics, is the talent of the moment that is most popular. To be temperate is to be stupid.

His wife, in her ermine folds, which clothed her as in snow from head to foot, and without any point of colour on her anywhere, with her

grave proud eyes that looked like arctic stars, and her slow, silent, undulating movement, might have the admiration of the court and city, but had no charm for him. She was his own; he had paid a price for her that he at times begrudged, and she had humiliated him. In a sense she was a perpetual humiliation to him, for he was a man of intellect enough to know her moral worth, and to know that he had never been worthy to pass the threshold of her chamber, to touch the hem of her garment. At the bottom of his heart there was always a sullen reverence for her, an unwilling veneration for her sinlessness and her honour, which only alienated him farther from her with each day.

'Why would you marry a young saint?' said his friend, the Duchesse Jeanne, always to him in derisive condolence.

Did he wish her a sinner instead? There were times when he almost felt that he did; when he almost felt that even at the price of his own loss he would like to see her head drop and her eyes droop under some conscious-

ness of evil; would like to be able once to cast at her some bitter name of shame.

There were times when he almost hated her, hated her for the transparent purity of her regard, for the noble scorn of her nature, for the silence and the patience with which she endured his many outrages. 'After all,' he thought to himself, 'what right has she to be so far above us all? She gave herself to me for my rank, as the others gave themselves for my gold.'

That cold glittering winter passed like a pageant, and in the midst of it there came a sorrow to her that had in it something of remorse. The old Dowager Duchess at Bulmer died after a day's illness; died in solitude, except for the faithful servants about her, and was buried under the weird bent oaks by the moors, by the northern sea. Vere lamented bitterly. 'And she died without knowing the truth of me!' she thought with bitter pain; and there was no message of pardon, no sign of remembrance from the dead to console her. 'We are an unforgiving race,' thought Vere,

wearily. 'I, too, cannot forgive. I can endure but I cannot pardon.'

This loss, and the state of her own health, gave her reason and excuse for leaving the world a little while. She remained absent while her husband waltzed with the Duchesse Jeanne at Imperial balls and winter fêtes, and gave suppers in the cafés of which the rooms were bowers of palms and roses, and the drinkers drank deep till the red sunrise.

She remained in solitude in the vast, luxurious, carefully heated palace of the Zouroff princes, where never a breath of cold air penetrated. Her health suffered from that imprisonment in a hot-house, which was as unnatural to her as it would have been to one of the young oak trees of Bulmer Chase, or to one of its moor-born forest does.

Another child was born to her, and born dead; a frail, pale, little corpse, that never saw the light of the world. She was long ill, and even the tediousness and exhaustion of lengthened weakness were welcome to her

since they released her from the court, from society, and from her husband.

When she was at length strong enough to breathe the outer air, the ice was broken up on the Neva, and even in Russia trees were budding, and grass pushing up its slender spears through the earth.

The Duchesse de Sonnaz had long before returned to Paris, and Prince Zouroff had gone there for business. By telegram he ordered his wife to join him as soon as she was able, and she also travelled there with Madame Nelaguine when all the lilac was coming into blossom in the Tuileries and the Luxembourg gardens, and behind the Hôtel Zouroff in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne.

A year had gone by; she had never seen the face of Corrèze.

She had learned in midwinter by the public voice that he had refused all engagements in Russia, giving as the plea the injury to his throat from the climate in past seasons. She had seen by the public press that he had been singing in Madrid and Vienna, had been to

Rome for his pleasure, and for months had been, as of old, the idol of Paris.

As she entered the city it was of him once more that she thought.

A flush of reviving life came into the paleness of her cheek, and a throb of eager expectation to her pulses as she thought that once more in the opera-house she would hear that perfect melody of the tones which had chanted the Nuit de Mai. It was May now, she remembered, and it was also night with her, one long dark hopeless night.

'*Voilà la belle Princesse!*' said a work-girl with a sigh of envy, as she chanced to stand by the great gilded gates of the Hôtel Zouroff, as Vere went through them in her carriage, lying back on the cushions of it with what was the lassitude of physical and mental fatigue, but to the work-girl looked like the haughty indolence and languor of a great lady. She was more beautiful than she had ever been, but she looked much older than she was; her youth was frozen in her, the ice seemed in her veins, in her brain, in her heart.

Prince Zouroff met her at the foot of the staircase. He had been in Paris two months.

'I hope you are not too tired?' he said politely, and gave her his arm to ascend the stairs. 'You look terribly white,' he added, when they were alone, and had reached the drawing-room. 'You will really have to rouge, believe me.'

Then, as if remembering a duty, he kissed her carelessly.

'I hope you will feel well enough to go to Orloff's to-night,' he added; 'I have promised that you will, and Worth tells me that he has sent you some new miracle expressly for it. The party is made for the Grand Duke, you know.'

'I dare say I shall be well enough,' Vere answered him simply. 'If you will excuse me, I will go to my room and lie down a little while.'

She went to her bedchamber where the 'Slave' of Gerôme hung on the wall.

'All these came this morning and yesterday for madame,' said her maid, showing her

a table full of letters, and notes, and invitation cards, and one large bouquet of roses amidst them.

Roses had been around her all winter in Petersburg, but these were very lovely unforced flowers; all the varieties of the tea-rose in their shades and sizes, with their delicate faint smell that is like the scent of old perfumed laces, but in the centre of all these roses of fashion and culture there was a ring of the fragrant homely dewy cabbage rose, and in the very centre of these, again, a little spray of sweet-briar.

Vere bent her face over their sweetness.

'Who sent these?' she asked; and before she asked she knew.

No one in the house did know. The bouquet had been left that morning for her. There was no name with it except her own name.

But the little branch of sweet-briar said to her that it was the welcome of Corrèze, who had not forgotten.

It touched and soothed her. It seemed

very sweet and thoughtful beside the welcome of her husband, who bade her rouge and go to an embassy ball.

'I always thought he had forgotten!' she mused, and, tired though she was, with her own hands she set the roses in a great cream-coloured bowl of Pesaro pottery of Casali di Lodi's, and had them close beside her couch as she fell asleep.

She who had so much pride had no vanity. It seemed strange to her that in his brilliant and busy life, full of its triumphs and its changes, he should remember one summer morning by the sea with a child.

That night she went to the splendour of Prince Orloff's fête; she did not rouge, but Paris found her lovelier than she had ever been; beneath the diamonds on her breast she had put a little bit of sweet-briar that no one saw. It seemed to her like a little talisman come out to her from her old lost life, when she and the world had been strangers.

It was a great party in the Rue de Grenelle.

Corrèze was there as a guest; he did not approach her.

The next night she was in her box in the opera-house. Corrèze sang in the Prophète. She met the gaze of his eyes across the house, and something in their regard throbbed through her with a thrill like pain, and haunted her. He had never been in grander force or more wondrous melody than he was that night. The Duchesse de Sonnaz, who accompanied Vere, broke her fan in the vehemence and enthusiasm of her applause.

'They say that there are two tenor voices, *la voix de clairon et la voix de clarinette*,' she said. 'The voice of Corrèze is the *voix du clairon* of an archangel.'

Vere sighed, quickly and wearily.

Jeanne de Sonnaz looked at her with a sudden and close scrutiny.

'Was there not some story of her and Corrèze?' she thought.

The next evening Corrèze was free.

He dined at Bignon's with some friends

before going to the receptions of the great world. As they left the café about ten o'clock they saw Prince Zouroff enter with a companion and pass on to one of the private rooms; he was laughing loudly.

'Who is with him to-night?' said one of the men who had dined with Corrèze. Another of them answered:

'Did you not see her black eyes and her mouth like a poppy? It is Casse-une-Croûte.'

Corrèze said nothing; he bade his friends good-night and walked down the Avenue de l'Opéra by himself, though rain was falling and strong winds blew.

If he had followed his impulse he would have gone back into Bignon's, forced open the door of the *cabinet particulier*, and struck Sergius Zouroff. But he had no right!

He returned to his own rooms, dressed, and went to two or three great parties. The last house he went to was the hotel in the Faubourg St. Germain of the Duc and Duchesse de Sonnaz.

It was a great *soirée* for foreign royalties;

Vere was present; the last injunction of her husband had been, as he had risen from the dinner-table: 'Go to Jeanne's by one o'clock to-night or she will be annoyed; you will say I am engaged; there is a club-meeting at the Ganaches.'

Vere never disobeyed his commands.

'I cannot love or honour you,' she had said to him once, 'but I can obey you,' and she did so at all times.

The night was brilliant.

It recalled the best days of the perished Empire.

The Princess Zouroff came late; Corrèze saw her arrive, and the crowds part, to let her pass, as they part for sovereigns; she wore black velvet only, she was still in mourning; her white beauty looked as though it were made of snow.

'And he goes to a mulattress!' thought Corrèze.

Later in the evening she chanced to be seated where there stood a grand piano in one of the drawing-rooms. He saw her from

afar off; the Duchesse Jeanne passing him hurriedly was saying to him at the time: 'If only you had not that cruel selfish rule never to sing a note for your friends, what a charm of the *bel imprévu* you might give to my poor little ball!'

Corrèze bowed before her. 'Madame, my rules, like all laws of the universe, must yield to you!'

He crossed the drawing-room to the piano.

Corrèze had never consented to sing professionally in private houses.

'The theatre is a different affair, but I do not choose my friends to pay me money,' he universally answered, and out of his theatre he was never heard, unless he sang for charity, or as an act of mere friendship. Even as a social kindness it was so rare that anyone could induce him to be heard at all, that when this night he approached the piano and struck a minor chord or two, the princely crowds hurried together to be near like the commonest mob in the world. Vere, only, did not move from where she sat on a low chair beneath some

palms, and the four or five gentlemen about her remained still because she did so.

She was some little distance from the instrument, but she saw him as he moved towards it more nearly than she had done since the recital of the Nuit de Mai.

She saw the beautiful and animated face that had fascinated her young eyes in the early morning light on the rocks of the Calvados shore. He had not changed in any way; something of the radiance and gaiety of its expression was gone—that was all.

He sat down and ran his hands softly over the keys in Schumann's 'Adieu.' She could no longer see him for the plumes of the palms and blossoms of the azaleas, that made a grove of foliage and flowers which concealed the piano, and there was a courtly crowd of gay people and grand people gathered around him in silence, waiting for the first sound of that voice which, because it was so rarely heard, was so eagerly desired. Hour after hour in his own rooms he would sing to the old man Auber, whom he loved, or in the rough studios

in the village of Barbizan he would give his music all night long to artists whose art he cared for, but by the world of fashion he was never heard out of the opera-house.

He struck a few pathetic chords in B minor, and sang to a melody of his own a song of Heine:

In mein gar zu dunkles Leben,

the song of the singer who is 'like a child lost in the dark.'

Had she understood that he had a tale to tell? Had the song of Heine, that bewailed a vanished vision, carried his secret to her? He could not know.

She sat quite still and did not lift her eyes. The crowd moved and screened her from his view.

'Will she understand?' he thought, as the applause of the people around him followed on the breathless stillness of delight with which they had listened. He heard nothing that they said to him. He was looking at her in the distance, where she sat with the great

white fan dropped upon her knee and her eyelids drooped over her eyes. He was thinking as he looked:

'And that brute goes with a quadroon to a restaurant! And when she had a dead child born to her, he went all the while with Jeanne de Sonnaz to masked balls and court fêtes on the ice!'

Over his mobile face as he mused a dark shadow went; the shadow of passionate disgust and of futile wrath.

His hands strayed a little over the keys, toying with memories of Chopin, and Beethoven, and Palestrina. Then to the air of a Salutaris Hostia that he had composed and sung for a great mass in Nôtre Dame years before, he sang clear and low as a mavis's call at daybreak to its love the *Prière* of a French poet.

She could not see him for the throngs of grand people and giddy people who surged about him in their decorations and their jewels, but the first notes of his voice came to her clear as a bird's call at daybreak to its love.

He sang to a melody in the minor of his own the simple pathetic verses of a young poet:

PRIÈRE.

AH! si vous saviez comme on pleure
De vivre seul et sans foyers,
Quelquefois devant ma demeure
Vous passeriez.

Si vous saviez ce que fait naître
Dans l'âme triste un pur regard,
Vous regarderiez ma fenêtre,
Comme au hasard.

Si vous saviez quel baume apporte
Au cœur la présence d'un cœur,
Vous vous assoiriez sous ma porte,
Comme une sœur.

Si vous saviez que je vous aime,
Surtout si vous saviez comment,
Vous entreriez peut-être même
Tout simplement.

His voice sank to silence as softly as a rose-leaf falls to earth.

Then there arose, like the buzz of a thousand insects, the adoring applause of a polished society.

Si vous saviez que je vous aime,
Surtout si vous saviez comment,
Vous entreriez peut-être même
Tout simplement!

The words had filled the room with their sweet ineffable melody, and had reached Vere and brought their confession to her.

Her heart leaped like a bound thing set free; then a burning warmth that seemed to her like fire itself seemed to flood her veins. In some way the great crowd had parted and she saw the face of Corrèze for a moment, and his eyes met hers.

He had told his tale in the language he knew best and loved the most.

The next he was lost in the midst of his worshippers, who vainly implored him to return and sing again.

Vere tutored by the world she lived in, sat quite still, and let her broad fan of white feathers lie motionless in her hands.

'Am I vile to have told her? Surely she must know it so well!' said Corrèze to himself as he sent his horses away and walked through the streets of Paris in the chill mists that heralded daylight. 'Am I vile to have told her? Will she ever look at me again? Will she hate me for ever? Will she understand? Perhaps

not. I sing a thousand songs; why should one have more meaning than another? She sees me play a hundred passions on the stage. Why should she believe I can feel one? And yet—and yet I think she will know, and perhaps she will not forgive; I fear she will never forgive.'

He reproached himself bitterly as he walked home after midnight through the throngs of the Boulevards. He said to himself that if he had not seen Sergius Zouroff entering Bignon's he would never so far have broken his resolution and failed in his honour. He reached his home, disturbed by apprehension and haunted with remorse. For an empire he would not have breathed a profane word in the ear of the woman who fulfilled his ideal of women, and he was afraid that he had insulted her.

He did not go to his bed at all; he walked up and down his long suite of rooms in the intense scent of the hothouse bouquets which as usual covered every table and console in the chambers.

For a less declaration than that, he had seen

great ladies glide veiled through his doors; nay, they had come unasked.

But he knew very well that she would never come one step on the way to meet him, even if she understood.

And that she would even understand he doubted.

The morning rose and the sun broke the mists, but its rays could not pierce through the olive velvet of his closed curtains. He walked to and fro, restlessly, through the artificial light and fragrance of his rooms. If she had been like the others, if he had heard her step on the stair, if he had seen that proud head veiled in the mask of a shameful secrecy, what would he have felt?—he thought he would have felt the instant rapture, the endless despair, that men felt in the old days who sold their souls to hell; the rapture that lived an hour, the despair that endured an eternity.

When he threw back his shutters and saw the brightness of morning, he rang and ordered his horse and rode out into the Bois without breaking his fast; the rides were all moist with

the night's rain; the boughs were all green with young leaf; birds were singing as though it were the heart of the provinces. He rode fast and recklessly; the air was clear and fresh with a west wind stirring in it; it refreshed him more than sleep.

As he returned two hours later he saw her walking in one of the *allées des piétons*; she was in black, with some old white laces about her throat; before her were her dogs and behind her was a Russian servant. He checked his horse in the ride adjacent, and waited for her to pass by him.

She did pass, bowed without looking at him, and went onward between the stems of the leafless trees.

Then he thought to himself that she had understood, but he doubted that she ever would forgive.

When she was quite out of sight he dismounted, gathered a late violet in the grass where she had passed him, and rode home.

'She understood a little,' he thought,

'enough to alarm, enough to offend her. She is too far above us all to understand more. Even life spent by the side of that brute has not tainted her. They are right to call her the ice-flower. She dwells apart in higher air than we ever breathe.'

And his heart sank, and his life seemed very empty. He loved a woman who was nothing to him, who could be nothing to him, and who, even if ever she loved him, he would no more drag down to the low level of base frailties than he would spit upon the cross his fathers worshipped.

The next night was the last of his engagement at the Grand Opera. It was a night of such homage and triumph as even he had hardly ever known. But to him it was blank; the box that was Prince Zouroff's was empty.

He left Paris at daybreak.

Vere did indeed, but imperfectly, understand. As the song had reached her ear a sudden flood of joy came to her with it; it had been to her as if the heavens had opened; she had for one moment realised all that her

life might have been, and she saw that he would have loved her.

When she reached the solitude of her chamber at home, she reproached herself; she seemed to herself to have sinned, and it seemed to her a supreme vanity to have dreamed of a personal message in the evening song of an eloquent singer. Did he not sing every night of love—every night that the public applauded the sorcery of his matchless music?

That he might have loved her, she did believe. There was a look in his regard that told her so, whenever his eyes met hers across the opera-house, or in the crowds of the streets, or of society. But of more she did not, would not, think.

Perhaps some memory of that one summer morning haunted him as it haunted her, with the sad vision of a sweetness that might have been in life, and never would be now; perhaps a vague regret was really with him. So much she thought, but nothing more.

The world she lived in had taught her nothing of its vanities, of its laxities, of its

intrigues. She kept the heart of her girlhood. She was still of the old fashion, and a faithless wife was to her a wanton. Marriage might be loveless, and joyless, and soulless, and outrage all that it brought; but its bond had been taken, and its obligations accepted; no sin of others could set her free.

Her husband could not have understood that, nor could her mother, nor could her world; but to Vere it was clear as the day, that, not to be utterly worthless in her own sight, not to be base as the sold creatures of the streets, she must give fidelity to the faithless, cleanliness to the unclean.

Even that caress she had given to the roses seemed to her treacherous and wrong.

CHAPTER XVII.

PRINCE ZOUROFF stayed in Paris until the end of June. There was no place that he liked so well. Lady Dolly passed a few weeks at Meurice's, and told her daughter with a little malice and a little pleasure, that the son to whom the Duchess of Mull had recently given birth, to the joy of all the Northumbrian border, had been baptised with the name of Vere, with much pomp at Castle Herbert.

'My name and my father's!' said Vere with coldest indignation. 'And *her* father sold drink and opium to miners!'

'And the brothers kill pigs—by machinery,' said her mother. 'Certainly it is

very funny. If Columbus had never discovered America would all these queer things have happened to us? There is no doubt we do get "mixed," as the lovely Fuschia would say.'

Pick-me-up, as Duchess of Mull, had become even a greater success, were that possible, than Fuschia Leach had been. No fancy frisk, no little dinner, no big ball was anything without that brilliantly tinted face of hers, with the little impertinent nose, and the big radiant audacious eyes that had the glance of the street-arab, and the surprise of the fawn. Francis of Mull, tender, stupid and shy, lived in a perpetual intoxication at the wonder of his own possession of so much beauty, so much mirth, and so much audacity, and no more dreamed of opposing her wishes than, excellent young man that he was, he had ever dreamed of opposing his tutors and guardians. He was under her charm in a blind, dazed, benighted way that diverted her, and yet made her heartily sick of him; and she took the reins of government into her own hands and kept

them. Not a tree was felled, not a horse was bought, not a farm lease was signed, but what the young duchess knew the reason why.

'I'll stop all this beastly waste, and yet I'll do it much finer, and get a lot more for my money,' she said to herself when she first went to the biggest house of all their houses, and she did do so with that admirable combination of thrift and display of which the American mind alone has the secret.

The expenses of his household in six months had been diminished by seven thousand pounds, yet the Duke of Mull had entertained royalty for three days at Castle Herbert with a splendour that his county had never seen. She was not at all mean, except in charities, but she got her money's worth.

'My dear old donkey, your wife didn't go pricing sprats all down Broadway without knowing what to give for a red herring,' said Her Grace, in the familiar yet figurative language in which the great nation she had belonged to delights.

'Cooking accounts won't go down with

her,' said the bailiffs, and the butlers, the housekeepers, the stud-grooms, and the head gardeners, to one another with a melancholy unanimity at all her houses.

'Do you know, Vere, she is a great success,' said Lady Dolly one day. 'Very, very great. There is nobody in all England one quarter so popular.'

'I quite believe it,' said Vere.

'Then why won't you be friends with her?'

'Why should I be?'

'Well, she is your cousin.'

'She is a woman my cousin has married. There is no possible relation between her and me.'

'But do you not think it is always as well to—to—be pleasant?'

'No, I do not. If no one else remember the oaks of the forests I do not forget them.'

'Oh, the oaks,' said Lady Dolly. 'Yes, they are mining there; but they were nasty, damp, windy places, I don't see that it matters.'

'What a terribly proud woman you are,

Vera,' added the Princess Nadine, who was every whit as proud herself, 'and yet you think so little of rank.'

'I think nothing of rank,' said Vere, 'but I do think very much of race; and I cannot understand how men, who are so careful of the descent of their horses and hounds, are so indifferent to the contamination of their own blood.'

'If you had lived before '90 you would have gone very grandly to the guillotine,' said her sister-in-law.

'I should have gone in good company,' said Vere; 'it is difficult to live in it now-a-days.'

'With what an air you say that,' said Madame Nelaguine; 'really sometimes one would think you were a marquise of a hundred years old, and in your childhood had seen your château burnt by the mob.'

'All my châteaux were burnt long ago,' said Vere, with a sigh that she stifled.

Madame Nelaguine understood.

Vere was glad when the warmth grew greater

with the days of early summer, and her husband, entering her morning-room, said abruptly:

'The Grand Prix is run to-morrow. You seem to have forgotten it. On Saturday we will go down to Félicité. You will invite Mdme. de Sonnaz and Mdme. de Mirilhac, and anyone else that you please. Nadine will come, no doubt.'

A Zouroff horse won the Grand Prix, and Prince Zouroff was for once in a contented mood, which lasted all the next day. As the train ran through the level green country towards Calvados he said with good-humoured gallantry to his wife,

'You have not invited me, Vera. The place is yours. I have no business in it unless you wish for me.'

'The place is always yours, and I am yours,' she answered in a low tone.

From a woman who had loved him the words would have been tender; from her, they were but an acknowledgment of being purchased. His humour changed as he heard them; his face grew dark; he devoted himself

to Mdme. Jeanne, who was travelling with them; she had refused to stay at Félicité, however, and had taken for herself the little Châlet Ludoff at Trouville.

'You are a bear; but she makes you dance, Sergius,' whispered the duchess with malice.

Zouroff frowned.

'Bears do something beside dancing,' he muttered.

'Yes; they eat honey,' replied Mdme. de Sonnaz. 'You have had more honey than was good for you all your days. Now you have got something that is not honey.'

Vere, with her delicate straight profile against the light, sat looking at the green fields and the blue sky, and did not hear what was said.

'If she cared, or rather if she understood,' thought the Duchess Jeanne, as she glanced at her; 'she would rule him instead of being ruled; she could do it; but she would have to keep the bear on hot plates—as I did.'

Zouroff, screened behind 'Figaro,' looked from one woman to the other.

'How *grande dame* she is,' he thought.

'Beside her Jeanne looks *bizarre*, ugly, almost vulgar. And yet Vera bores me when she does not enrage me, and enrages me when she does not bore me; while with the other, one is always on good terms with one's self.'

'I know what you were thinking, my friend,' whispered the duchess under cover of the noise and twilight of the Martainville tunnel. 'But all the difference, I assure you, is that she is your wife and I am Paul's. If she were not your wife you would be furiously in love with her, and were I your wife you would find me a *chatte enragée* with frightful green eyes.'

Zouroff laughed grimly. He did not tell her that his thoughts had been less complimentary than those she had attributed to him.

'I could find it in me to tell you your eyes were green when you spite me by not coming to Félicité,' he murmured instead.

Mdme. Jeanne twisted the 'Figaro' about, and said: 'Chut! We shall meet more freely at the little Ludoff house.'

Vere only heard the rustling of the 'Figaro' sheet. She was looking at the clock-tower of

St. Tourin, and the summer glory of the forest of Evreux.

Madame Jeanne stayed at Trouville. Vere, with her husband, drove in the panier, with four white ponies, that awaited them at the station, along the shady avenue that leads out of the valley of the Toucques towards Villiers. The sunshine was brilliant, the air sweet, the sea, when the rise of the road brought it into view, was blue as the sky, and the fishing fleets were on it. Vere closed her eyes as the bright marine picture came in sight, and felt the tears rise into them.

Only three years before she had been Vere Herbert, coming on the dusty sands below, with no more knowledge or idea of the world's pomps, and vanities, and sins, and vices, than any one of the brighteyed deer that were now living out their happy lives under the oak shadows of Bulmer Chase. Only three years before!

Zouroff, lying back in the little carriage, looked at her through his half-shut eyelids.

'*Ma chère*! he said with his little rough laugh, 'we ought to feel very sweet emotions,

you and I, returning here. Tell me are you *à la hauteur de l'occasion?* I fear I am not. Perhaps, after a glass of sherry, the proper emotion may visit me.'

Vere made no reply. Her eyes, wide-opened now, were looking straight forward; she drove her ponies steadily.

'What do you feel?' he persisted. 'It is an interesting return. Pray tell me.'

'I have ceased to analyse what I feel,' she answered, in her clear cold voice. 'I prefer to stifle it.'

'You are very courteous!'

'I think you have very often said yourself that courtesy is not one of the obligations of marriage. You ask me for the truth, I tell you the truth.'

'In three years of the world have you not learned a pretty lie yet!'

'No. I shall not learn it in twenty years.'

'Do you know that there are times when you answer me so that I could beat you like a dog?'

'I dare say.'

'Is that all you say?'

'What should I say? If you beat me, it would not hurt me much more than other things.'

Zouroff was silent. He saw that she drove her ponies on tranquilly, and that her blush-rose cheek neither flushed nor paled. Master of her body and mind, present and future, though he was, he had a sullen sense of her escaping him always, and he had as sullen a respect for her courage and her calmness.

'She would be a mother of young lions!' he thought, as Lamartine thought of Delphine Gay, and he felt bitter against her that his sons had died.

They reached Félicité as the sun set over the sea, where the low shores by Caen were hidden in a golden mist. The dressing bell was ringing in the Gothic clock tower; the tribe of canary-hued lacqueys were bending to the ground in the beautiful cedar-wood hall, with its pointed arches, and its illuminated shields, which had captivated the young eyes of Vere Herbert.

Madame Nelaguine had arrived before them,

and her welcome, wit, and careful tact saved them from the terrors and the tedium of a *tête-à-tête*.

'Are you glad to come here, Vera?' she asked.

'I am glad to see the sea,' answered Vere. 'But I am tired of moving from house to house. We have no home. We have only a number of hotels.'

'I think you will be happier than in Paris,' said the Princess Nadine. 'You will have the trouble of a house party, it is true; but your mornings you can spend in your garden, your hothouses, with your horses, or on the sea; you will be freer.'

'Yes,' assented Vera. She did not hear; she was looking through the great telescope on the terrace down along the line of the shore; she was trying to discern amongst the broken confused indentations of the rocky beach the place where Corrèze had sung to her and to the lark. But the sea and land were blent in one golden glow as the sun went down behind the black cliffs of western Calvados, and she could discern nothing that she knew.

The dressing-bell was ringing, and she hurried to her rooms. Her husband was intolerant of any excuses of fatigue or indisposition, and always expected to see her in full toilette whether there was no one, or whether there were fifty persons, at his table. Sometimes it seemed to her as if all her life were consumed in the mere acts of dressing and undressing; the paradise of other women was her purgatory.

They dined alone, only enlivened by the ironies of the Princess Nadine, who, when she chose could be exceedingly amusing, if very acid in her satires; when dinner was over they went out on to the terrace where the moonlight was brilliant. Some gentlemen from the Château Villiers had ridden over to congratulate Prince Zouroff on the achievement of his racer. They were old friends of his, heroes and disciples of 'le sport.' After a while they talked only of that idol. Vere sat looking at the moonlit Channel. Madame Nelaguine, within the room, was playing quaint mournful melodies of old German composers, and sad

Russian folk-airs. Félicité was very peaceful, very lovely; on the morrow the glittering noisy feverish life of the great world would begin under its roof, with its house-party of Parisians and Russians.

'What a pity, what a pity! One has not time to breathe,' thought Vere, as she leaned her head against the marble balustrade, and rested her eyes on the sea.

'What a pity!' she thought, 'the loveliest things in all creation are the sunrise and the moonlight; and who has time in our stupid life, that is called pleasure, to see either of them?'

A full moon made the narrow sea a sheet of silver; a high tide had carried the beach up to the edge of the black rocks; in the white luminous space one little dark sail was slowly drifting before the wind, the sail of a fishing or dredging boat. The calmness, the silence, the lustre, the sweet, fresh, strong sea-scent, so familiar to her in her childhood, filled her with an infinite melancholy.

Only three years, and how changed she was!

All her youth had been burnt up in her; all hope was as dead in her heart as if she were already old.

She sat and thought, as the dreamy music from within united with the murmur of the sea; she had said truly that she now strove to stifle thought, but her nature was meditative, and she could never wholly succeed.

'Perhaps I am not right, perhaps I do not do all that I might,' she mused; and her conscience reproached her with harshness and hatred against the man whom she had sworn to honour.

'Honour!' she thought bitterly: what a world of mockery lay in that one little word.

Yet he was her husband; according to his light he had been generous to her; she would have to bear his children, and his name was her name for ever. It would be better if they could live in peace.

When his friends had ridden back to Villiers, and his sister was still dreamily wandering through many musical memories, Sergius Zouroff was standing on the terrace,

looking seaward, and calculating how quickly his yacht would be able to come round on the morrow from Cherbourg. Midnight chimes were sounding softly from the Flemish carillon in the clock-tower of his château.

Vere looked at him, hesitated, then rose and approached him.

'Sergius,' she said in a low voice, 'I spoke wrongly to you to-day; I beg your pardon.'

Zouroff started a little, and looked down in surprise at the proud delicate face of his wife as the moonlight fell on it.

'You are not going to make me a scene?' he said irritably and apprehensively.

On the lofty yet wistful mood of Vere the words fell like drops of ice. A momentary recollection had moved her to something like hope that her husband might make her duty less penance and less pain to her, by some sort of sympathy and comprehension. She had bent her temper to the concession of a humility very rare with her, and this was all her recompense. She checked the reply that rose to her lips, and kept her voice serene and low.

'I do not wish to annoy you in any way,' she said simply; 'I saw that I was wrong to-day; that I had failed in the respect I owe you; I thought I ought to confess it and beg your pardon.'

Zouroff stared at her with his gloomy sullen eyes. She looked very fair to him, as she stood there with the silvery rays of the moon on her bent face and her white throat and breast; and yet she had lost almost all charm for him, whilst the ugliness of Jeanne de Sonnaz kept his sluggish passions alive through many years. He stared down on her, scarcely thinking at all of her words, thinking only as men do every hour and every century, why it was that the pure woman wearies and palls, the impure strengthens her chains with every night that falls. It is a terrible truth, but it is a truth.

'How lovely she is!' he thought, 'her mouth is a rose, her eyes are stars, her breasts are lilies, her breath is the fragrance of flowers; and—I like Casse-une-Croûte better, who is the colour of copper, and smells of smoke and brandy as I do!'

That was what he was thinking.

Vere looked away from his face outward to the sea, and laid her hand for a moment on his arm.

'It is three years ago,' she said wistfully, 'I did not know very well what I did; I was only a child; now I do know—I would do otherwise. But there is no going back. I am your wife. Will you help me a little to do what is right? I try always——'

Her voice faltered slightly.

Her husband's mind came out from his thoughts of Casse-une-Croûte and Duchesse Jeanne, and realised that she was asking him for sympathy. He stared; then felt a passing heat of sullen shame; then thrust away the emotion and laughed.

'My dear,' he said, with the cynical candour that was rather brutality than sincerity, 'three years ago we both made a great mistake. Everyone who marries says the same. But we must make the best of it. I am a rich man, and an indulgent one, and that must content you. You are a lovely woman, and

a cold one, and that must content me. If you bear me living sons you will do all a wife wants to do, and if I pay your bills and allow you to amuse yourself in your own way I do not see that you can complain of me. The less we are alone, the less likely are we to quarrel. That is a conjugal maxim. And do not make me serious scenes of this sort. They tire me, and I have no wish to be rude to you. Will you not go to your room? You look fatigued.'

Vere turned away, and went into the house. Her husband remained on the terrace sending the smoke of his great cigar out on to the moonlit sea-scented air.

'She grows sentimental,' he said to himself, 'it is better stopped at once. Can she not be content with her chiffons and her jewels?'

The following day the Parisian contingent filled the château, and from morn till night, the mirth and movement of a gay house-party spoiled for the mistress of Félicité its woodland beauty and its seashore freshness.

Never to escape from the world grew as

wearisome and as terrible to Vere as the dust of the factory to the tired worker, as the roar of the city streets to the heart-sick sempstress. Never to escape from it; never to be alone with the deep peace of nature, with the meditations of great dead poets, with the charm of lonely and noble landscape—this seemed to her as sad and as dreary as, to the women who surrounded her, it would have seemed to have been condemned to a year without lovers and rivals, to a solitude without excitement, and intrigue, and success. To have a moment alone was their terror; never to have a moment alone was her torture. The difference of feeling made a gulf between her and them that no equality of beauty, and accomplishment, and position could bridge. There was no sympathy possible between Vere and the pretty painted people of her world.

She had no standing-point in common with them, except her social rank. Their jargon, their laughter, their rivalries, their pleasures, were all alike distasteful to her. When she

drove over with them to Trouville at five o'clock, and sat amidst them, within a stone's throw of what the horrible pleasantry of society calls the *jolies impures*, she thought the levée that the proscribed sisterhood held on those sands was quite as good as the levée of the great ladies around her.

In return women hated her. 'She is so *farouche*,' they said. They only meant that she was chaste, with that perfect chastity of thought, as well as of act, which the whole tone and tenour of society destroys in its devotees, and ridicules in the few cases where it cannot be destroyed.

Only Jeanne de Sonnaz professed to admire, nay to love, her. But then everyone knew that Madame Jeanne was a clever woman, who said nothing, and did nothing, without a reason.

'Try to be amiable—if you know how to be amiable—with Madame de Sonnaz,' had been the command of Zouroff to his wife on the first day that she and the French duchess had met; and Vere had been indebted to the brilliant Parisienne for many a word of social counsel,

many an indication of social perils, where the stiff frivolities of etiquette were endangered, or a difficult acquaintance required tact to conciliate or rebuff it. Vere believed innocently and honestly that Jeanne de Sonnaz liked her, and was angered with and reproached herself for not being sufficiently grateful, and being unable fully to return the regard.

'I think she is not a good woman,' she said once, hesitatingly, to her sister-in-law.

Madame Nelaguine smiled a little grimly, with a look that made her resemble her brother.

'My dear, do not be too curious about goodness. If you inquire so much for it, it will lead you into as much trouble as the pursuit of the Sangréal did the knights of old; and I am afraid you will not find it. As for Jeanne, she is always in her chair at the Messe des Paresseux at St. Philippe, she turns a lottery wheel at fêtes for the poor, and her husband has always lived with her. What more can you want? Do not be too exacting.'

Vere vaguely felt that Madame Nelaguine

thought anything but well of her friend; but she got no more information, and Madame Jeanne came most days over to Félicité and said to all there, 'How lovely is Vera!—odd, cold, inhuman, yes; but one adores her.'

One morning Vere, risen several hours before her guests, felt a wistful fancy, that had often visited her, to try and find again that little nest of fishers' cottages where she had eaten the cherries, and heard Corrèze sing in rivalry to the lark. It was a wish so innocent and harmless that she saw no reason to resist it; she had her ponies ordered while the day was still young, and drove out of her own park-gates down to Deauville and Trouville, and through them, and along the road to Villerville. At Villerville she left her ponies, and walked with no escort except Loris through the sea of greenery that covers the summit of the table-land of Calvados, while the salt sea washes its base.

The name of this little village she had never known, but, guessing by the position it had been in above the sea, she knew that it

must have been somewhere between Grand Bec and Villerville; and she followed various paths through orchards, and grass meadows, and cornfields divided by lines of poplars, and at last found the lonely place quite unchanged.

The old woman who had called him Saint Raphael was knitting by the fence of furze; the cherry trees were full of fruit; the cabbage-roses were pushing their dewy heads against the tiny roses of the sweet-briar; sun-burnt children were dragging nets over the short grass; the lark was singing against the sky. Nothing had changed except herself.

No one of them recognised her.

The old woman gave her a frank good-morrow, and the children stared, but no one of them thought that this great lady, with the gold-headed cane, and the old lace on her white skirts, was the child that had sat there three years before, and drunk the milk in its wooden bowl, and worn the wooden shoes. She asked for a little water, and sat down by the sweet-briar hedge; she was thinking of Corrèze. He was seldom absent from her thoughts; but he

remained so pure, so lofty, so ideal a figure in her fancy, that his empire over her memory never alarmed her.

He was never to her like other men.

She sat and listened, with divided attention, to the garrulity of the old white-capped woman, who went on knitting in the sun, against her wall of furze, and chattered cheerfully, needing no reply. They were hard times, she thought. People had said with the Republic there would be no poor, but she could see no difference herself; she had lived through many of them—meaning governments—but they were each as bad as the other, she thought. Bread was always dear. The *moules* were plentiful this year; the Republic had no hand in that; and the deep-sea fishing had been very fair too. Did madame see that lark? That little fool of a bird brought her in as much as the *moules*; a gentleman had taken such a fancy to it that he came and saw it was safe every summer, sometimes oftener; and he always left her five napoleons or more. There were so many larks in the world, or would be if people did not eat

them; she could not tell what there was about hers, but the gentleman always gave her money because she let it live in the grass. Perhaps madame had heard of him: he had a beautiful face; he was a singer, they said; and to hear him sing—she had heard him once herself—it was like heaven being opened.

Verè listened with undivided attention now, and her eyes grew soft and dim.

'Does he remember like that?' she thought; and it seemed to her so strange that he should never have sought to speak to her.

'Does he come for the lark only?' she asked.

'He says so,' answered the old woman. 'He always takes a rose and a bit of sweet-briar. The first day he was here there was a pretty girl with him, that he bought sabots for, because she had lost her shoes on the beach. Perhaps the girl may be dead. I have thought so sometimes; it cannot be only for the lark; and he sits here a long time, a long time—and he is sad. He was here a day in May—that was the last.'

The warmth of a sudden blush came over her hearer's proud face. She did not know what she felt; she felt a thrill of alarm, a strange pleasure, a vague trouble. She rose at once, and left a little money in the lean hand, as she bade the old peasant goodday, called Loris from his chase of chickens, and began to retrace her way to Villerville.

The old woman looked after her along the flat path over the turf that went on under the apple trees, and through the wheatfields, till it joined the road to Grand Bec.

'Now I think of it,' she muttered to her knitting needles. 'That great lady has the eyes of that tired child who had the wooden shoes. Perhaps she is the same—only dead that way—dead of being stuffed with gold, as so many of them are.'

'Granny, that is the Russian Princess from Félicité,' said a fisherman who was coming up over the edge of the rocks, hanging his nets on the poles; and saw the tall slender figure of Vere going through the tall green corn.

'Aye, aye!' said the old woman. 'Well,

she has given me a gold bit. Never was a bird that brought so much money from the clouds as my lark.'

Her son laughed. 'I saw your other lark in Trouville this morning; he had come by the Havre packet from England. He knew me, and asked for you all. He said he would only stay here an hour on his way to Paris, but would soon be back again, and then would come and see you. They took all my fish at the Roches Noires, just at a word from him to the porter in the hall!'

'*Tiens!*' said the old woman thoughtfully, and she kept her thoughts to herself.

'Where have you been, *O ma belle matinâle*,' said the Duchess Jeanne, as Vere went up the steps of the sea-terrace to enter the anteroom of Félicité, where the duchess, just downstairs at twelve o'clock, was breathing the morning air in the most charming of dressing gowns—a miracle of swans' down and old Mechlin, with a knot here and there of her favourite cardinal red. She had passed the night there after a ball.

Zouroff was with her; both were smoking.

'I have been a long drive,' answered Vere; 'you know I rise early.'

'Where did you go?' asked Zouroff brusquely. 'I object to those senseless long drives in the country.'

'I went as far as Villerville,' she answered. 'I went to see a few fisher-people that live on the coast near there.'

The hour before she would have said it without any other thought than what her words expressed.

Now her remembrance of what the woman had said of Corrèze made her hesitate a little, and a certain colour came in her face, that both her husband and her guest noticed. It seemed to the exquisite and loyal truthfulness of her temper that she had been guilty of a thing even meaner than a falsehood—a reservation.

'It was where I lost my way the first day I was with my mother,' she said; and turned to her husband, as making the explanation only to him. 'Perhaps you remember? Everyone laughed about it at the time.'

'I think I remember,' said Zouroff moodily. 'It could scarcely be worth a pilgrimage.'

'Unless she have a *carte tendre du pays*,' said the duchess with a little laugh. 'Oh, a million pardons, my sweet Vera; you never permit a jest, I know.'

'I permit any jest if it be witty, and have no offence in it,' said Vere very coldly. 'If you and the Prince will allow me, I will go indoors; I am a little tired and dusty, and Loris is more than a little.'

'You had no intention in what you said, Jeanne?' muttered Zouroff to his companion, when Vere had entered the house. 'You cannot possibly mean——'

'Mean! Of your pearl of women, your white swan, your emblem of ice? What should I mean? It amused me to see her look angry; that is all. I assure you, if you made her angry much oftener, she would amuse you much more. Do you know, do you know, *mon vieux*, I should never be in the least surprised if, a few years later, you were to become a jealous husband! How funny it will be. But

really, you looked quite oriental in your wrath just now. Be more angry more often. Believe me, your wife will entertain you more. Especially as she will never deserve it.'

Leaving that recipe behind her, fraught with all the peril it might bear, Madame Jeanne dragged her muslins and her Mechlin over the marbles of the terrace, and went also within doors to attend to the thousand and one exigencies of a great spectacle which she had conceived, and was about to give the world.

It was a Kermesse for the poor—always for the poor.

Madame Jeanne, who was a woman of energy, and did not mind trouble (she had been one of the leaders of a *régime* that dressed seven times a day), was the head and front, the life and soul, of her forthcoming Kermesse, and was resolute to leave no pains untaken that should make it the most successful fancy fair of its season. She had already quantities of royalties promised her as visitors. Poor Citron had pledged herself to preside at a puppet show; '*toute la gomme*' would be golden

lambs to be shorn; and all the great ladies, and a few of the theatrical celebrities, were to be vendors, and wear the costumes and the jewellery of Flemish peasantry.

'I have written to beg Corrèze to come, but he will not,' she said once in the hearing of Vere. 'He used to be at Trouville every year, but he never comes now. I suppose some woman he cares about goes elsewhere.'

She was very provoked, because she wanted to have a grand mass at Nôtre Dame des Victoires, and 'quêter' afterwards; and if Corrèze would have sung some Noël or some Salutaris Hostia, it would have brought hundreds more napoléons into her plate for the poor; so, angrily, she abandoned the idea of the mass, and confined herself to the glories of the Kermesse.

Vere, to whom the mingling of the poor with a fancy fair, and the confusion of almsgiving with diversion, always seemed as painful as it was grotesque, took no heed of all the preparations, and received in silence her husband's commands to take a place in it. He was peremptory, and she was always obedient.

She wrote to her people in Paris to send her down all that was necessary, and after that ceased to occupy herself with a folly she secretly disapproved; a mockery of the misery of the world which made her heart ache.

The day before the first opening of this Kermesse, which was to eclipse every other show of the sort, Prince Zouroff, with his wife and sister, and most of their guests, drove over to Trouville to see the arrangements. Madame Jeanne had erected her pretty booths in the glades of the Comte d'Hautpoul, and had had that charming park conceded to her for her merry-go-rounds, her lotteries, her *diseurs de bonnes aventures*, her merry-andrews, and her other diversions. Madame Jeanne's taste was the taste of that Second Empire, under which the comet of her course had reached its perihelion; but the effect of her taste in this little canvas city of pleasure was bright, brilliant, and picturesque, and the motley colours in which she delighted made a pretty spectacle under the green leaves of the trees. Every booth had the name of the lady who would officiate at it

blazoned above; and, above the lottery-booth was written, 'Madame de Sonnaz,' with a scarlet flag that bore her arms and coronet fluttering against the blue sky. The next was the Marquise de Merilhac's, green and primrose; the next the Countess Schondorff's, amber and violet; the next, of pale blue, with a pale blue pennon, and the arms and crown in silver, was the Princess Zouroff's.

'It is exceedingly pretty,' said Vere, as she stood before the little pavilion.

There were about ten others, all in divers hues, with their pennons fluttering from tall Venetian masts. The avillions stood about in a semi-oval where the sward was green and the trees were tall. Servants were bringing in all the fanciful merchandise that was to be for sale on the morrow; a few gendarmes had been sent to protect the fair during the night; some children, with flying hair and fluttering skirts, and some baby-sailors, were at play on the real wooden horses which the duchess had had down from St. Cloud.

'It is extremely pretty,' said Vere cour-

teously to the projectress and protectress of it all, and her eyes glanced round the semi-circle. Immediately facing hers was a booth of white stripes and rose-colour, looped up with great garlands of pink roses; the flag above had no arms, but, instead, had a device in gold, a squirrel cracking nuts, with the motto, '*Vivent les bracconniers!*' It was a device known to *tout Paris*, except to Vere; but even she knew the name underneath, which she read in the glow of the late afternoon light,

'Mademoiselle Noisette.'

She stood in the entrance of her own pavilion and saw it. Her face grew very white, and a haughty indignation blazed in her grand, grave eyes.

Madame Jeanne, standing by, and chattering volubly, with her eyeglasses up to her eyes, saw the look and rejoiced in her soul.

'It will be amusing,' she said to herself. 'How *very* angry quiet people can be!'

Vere, however, disappointed her. She made no scene; she remained still and tranquil, and, in a clear voice, gave a few directions to

the servants who were arranging the contents of her own stalls.

Madame Jeanne felt the pang an archer knows when, at a great public fête, the arrow aimed for the heart of the gold, misses its mark, and strikes the dust.

It was to be chagrined like this that she, Duchesse de Sonnaz, and daughter of the mighty Maison du Merilhac, had stretched her Second Empire laxities so far as to permit on the grounds of her own Kermesse the Free Lances of the Paris Theatres!

Nothing was said; nothing was done; Madame Jeanne felt cheated, and her Kermesse seemed already shorn of its splendour.

Vere remained very calm, very still; she did not move outside the curtains of her own azure nest.

'Guilt hath pavilions and no secrecy,' murmured the Princess Nadine, changing the well-known line by a monosyllable, as she glanced across at the pink and white booth with its peccant squirrel. But she murmured it only in the ear of a tried and

trusty old friend, the Count Schondorff, who for more years than she would have cared to count had been her shadow and her slave, her major-domo and her souffredouleur. 'I am so glad Vera takes it so well,' she thought with relief.

A little later there came into the pink tent a handsome woman in a black dress, with knots of pink; she had a dome-like pile of glistening hair, gorgeous beauty, a splendid bust; she looked like a rose-hued rhododendron made human.

It was Noisette. She bustled and banged about rather noisily and laughed loudly with the men accompanying her, and scolded the servants unpacking her packages.

'*V'là la petite!*' said Noisette as she looked across the sward at the azure pavilion. She always said the same thing when she saw the Princess Zouroff.

In a good-natured scornful way Noisette pitied her.

The sunset hour wore away, and Vere had made no sign that she had seen the name

beneath the golden squirrel and the woman whose badge the poaching-squirrel was.

Madame de Sonnaz was disappointed and perplexed. She had seen the look in Vere's eyes, and as she thought her cold, but not tame, she wondered that she bore the insult so passively. She drove homeward with them to dine at Félicité and pass the night there.

'Surely it will be a great success to-morrow,' she cried gleefully. '*O mon Dieu!* how tired I am—and how much more tired I shall be!'

'You are too good to the poor,' said Vere with an intonation that the duchesse did not admire.

'She will be unbearable when she is a little older,' she said to herself.

Vere reached her home, changed her dress for dinner, went down with the light on her opals and in her eyes—which had a dark stern look in them, new there—and bore herself throughout the dinner with that cold grace, that lofty simplicity, which had gained her the name of the Alpine flower.

'I suppose she accepts the thing with the

rest,' thought Madame Jeanne, as she sat on the right hand of Zouroff; and she felt bitterly angry with herself for having stooped to open the pavilions of her fancy-fair to the dramatic sisterhood, even though it were in the pure interests of charity.

After dinner when her people were scattered about—some playing cards, some merely flirting, some listening to the choral and orchestral music that the choice taste of Madame Nelaguine had always made a constant charm of the house-parties of Félicité—Sergius Zouroff, as he passed one moment from the card-room to the smoking-room, was stopped by his wife. She stood before him with her head erect, her hands crossed on a large fan of feathers.

'Monsieur,' she said very calmly, though her voice was altogether unlike what it had been on the terrace the night of their return; 'Monsieur, you desired me to take part in the so-called Kermesse to-morrow?'

'Certainly,' said Zouroff, and he stared at her.

'Then,' she said, very quietly still, 'you

will see that the pavilion of the actress, Mademoiselle Noisette, is taken down, or differently occupied. Otherwise, I do not go to mine.'

Zouroff was silent from utter amazement. He stared at her blankly.

'What did you say?' he said savagely, after some moments' silence. 'What did you say? Are you mad?'

'I think you heard very well what I said,' replied Vere. 'All I have to say is that if Mademoiselle Noisette be present I shall not be. That is for you to decide.'

Then, without any more words, or even any look at him, she passed on into the music-room, and joined some other ladies.

Sergius Zouroff stood and stared after her. He felt much the same emotion as his ancestors might have felt when some serf, whom they had been long used to beat and torture, rose up and struck them in return. What did she know of Noisette? He supposed that she must know all, since she took no exception to the two other actresses, who were permitted to take part in the Kermesse of the *grandes dames*.

He did not care what she knew—or he thought he did not; but he cared bitterly that she should dare to affront him and defy him, dare to make him what he termed a scene, dare to erect her will in opposition to his own. And, amidst all the turbulence of anger, self-will, was a sullen sense of shame; a consciousness that his life was no more fit to be mated with hers than the lips of a drunkard are fit to touch an ivory chalice of consecrated wine.

He sought his sister.

'Nadine,' he said sharply, 'have you ever told Vera of Noisette?'

Madame Nelaguine glanced at him with some contempt.

'I? do I ever talk? do I ever do anything but what is rational?'

'Who has then?'

'Has anyone? Probably *le tout Paris*, everybody and nobody. What is the matter?'

'The matter! She has made me a scene. She declares that if Noisette be in her booth to-morrow, she will not go to her own. She is not the ignoramus that you think.'

'After three years as your wife, Sergius, how should she be? I am sorry she has begun to observe these things. I will speak to her if you like. Unless you will withdraw Noisette.'

'Withdraw Noisette! Do you suppose she ever listens to me? do you suppose I should not be the laughing-stock of all society if I quarrelled with her to please Vera's caprices?'

'If you annoyed your mistress to avoid insulting your wife, society would laugh at you? Yes, I suppose it would. What a nice world it is,' thought the Princess Nadine, as she said aloud, 'I will see Vera. But she is difficult to persuade. And you will pardon me, Sergius, but here I do think she is rather right. It is not good form to have Mademoiselle Noisette or Mademoiselle anybody else of the same—adventurous—reputation mixed up with *us* in any affair of this kind.'

'Perhaps not,' said Zouroff roughly. 'But Jeanne chose to have it so. She thought they would attract. So they will, and it is no more than having their carriages next yours in the Bois.'

'Or our lovers, and brothers, and husbands in their dressing-rooms,' thought Madame Nelaguine. 'You are not very just, Sergius,' she said aloud. 'Jeanne may have a will of her own, Noisette may have one, anybody; but not Vera.'

'Vera is my wife,' said Prince Zouroff.

To him it seemed as clear as day that all the difference between these women was thus expressed.

'You are quite resolved then,' she said with some hesitation, 'not to see any justice in this objection of Vera's, not to give in to it, not to contrive in some way to secure the absence of Mademoiselle Noisette to-morrow?'

'Nadine Nicolaivna!' cried her brother in wrath. 'After forty years that we have been in this world, do you know me so little that you want to ask such a thing? After Vera's insolence I would drag Noisette to that pavilion to-morrow if she were dying!'

'Will you drag your wife?' said Madame Nadine, with a little disgust; but Zouroff had

left her, and was on his way to the smoking-room.

'He is nothing but a spoiled child grown big and brutal,' thought his sister, with a little shrug of her shoulders. 'How I wish he had married a *diablesse* like Jeanne.'

An hour later, when the ladies all went to their rooms, Madame Nelaguine asked entrance for a moment at Vere's door, and, without beating about the bush, said simply:

'My dear, Sergius has asked me to speak to you about the Kermesse to-morrow. Now I think I know all that actuates you, and I will admit that my own feeling is quite with you; but it is too late now to alter anything; Sergius is obstinate, as you know; especially obstinate if he fancy his will is disputed. This objection of yours can only lead to scenes, to disputes, to differences, very trying, very useless, and—worst of all—very diverting to others. Will you not abandon the point? It is not you that the presence of this person at the fair will shame, but himself.'

Vere heard quite patiently; her maid, who

did not understand English, which Madame Nelaguine, like most Russians, spoke admirably, was brushing out her thick bright hair.

'It was my fault not to attend more to the details of the thing,' she answered; 'but I had heard nothing of Mademoiselle Noisette being permitted in the park. It is your brother's shame certainly, but if I submitted to so public an insult as that, I should be, I think, scarcely higher than Mademoiselle Noisette herself. We will not talk about it; it is of no use; only, unless you can tell me that her name and her flag are withdrawn from the pavilions, I do not stir from here to-morrow. That is all.'

'Ah!' ejaculated Madame Nadine, very wearily. 'My dear, have you any conception of what Sergius can be, can do, when he is crossed? Believe me, I am not defending him for an instant—no one could; but I have seen twice as long a life as you have, Vera, and I have never seen any good come of the wife's indignation in these cases. Society may go with her for the moment, but it deserts her in the long run. Her husband is embittered by

the exposure, and he has always a strength she has not. The world does not insist that a wife shall have Griselda's virtue or Griselda's affection, but it does insist that she shall have Griselda's patience. Noisette, and a thousand Noisettes, if your husband forget himself for them, cannot hurt *you* in the eyes of the world; but one rash moment of indignation and rupture may be your ruin.'

Vere lifted her face, with all its loosened hair like a golden cloud about it, and her face was very cold and contemptuous, and almost hard in its scorn.

'Dear Princess,' she said very briefly and chillily, 'I did not wish to trouble you on this subject. You are not to blame for your brother's vices, or for my marriage. Only, pray understand, since we do speak of it, that my mind is quite made up. If Mademoiselle Noisette be permitted to be present at the park to-morrow, I shall be absent. I was a child three years ago, but I am not a child now.'

Madame Nelaguine sighed.

'Of course you know everything, dear;

women always do, even when nobody says a syllable to them. You are wronged, wounded, insulted; all that I admit with sorrow. But what I want to persuade you is, that this method of avenging yourself will do no sort of good. You will only give a triumph to Noisette; you will only give a laugh to your friends and your enemies—for friends and enemies are so sadly alike in the way they look at one's misfortunes! My dear child, society has settled all these things; the *belles petites* are seen everywhere except just in our drawing-rooms; they will be soon there also, perhaps. The fiction of society is, that we know nothing of their existence; the fact of society is, that they are our most powerful and most successful rivals, and dispute each inch of ground with us. Now, wise women sustain the fiction and ignore the fact; like society. I want you to be one of these wise ones. It ought to be easy to you, because you have no love for Sergius.'

A very bitter look came for the moment on Vere's face. She raised her head once more with a very proud gesture.

'Let us say no more, Nadine. I have self-respect. I will not be a public spectacle *vis-à-vis* with one of Prince Zouroff's mistresses. He can choose whether he sees her in her pavilion, or me in mine. He will not see both. Good-night.'

Sorrowful, discomforted, baffled, but knowing that her sister-in-law had justice on her side, though not prudence, the Princess Nelaguine went to her own chamber.

'War has begun,' she thought; and she shuddered, because she knew her brother's temper. When he was ten years old she had seen him strangle a pet monkey because the small creature disobeyed him in its tricks.

Madame Nelaguine awoke in the morning feverish with anxiety. She was not a good woman, but she had honour in her, and was capable of affection. She had begun to detest her brother, and to care much for his wife. The day was clear and warm, not too warm; and a strong soft wind was tossing the white foam of the sea, and would blow brightly on the pretty pennons of the Kermesse pavilions.

Vere rose earlier than anyone, as her habit was, and walked out into the garden with Loris by her side. She was not in any way anxious; her mind was made up; and, of anything that her husband might say or might do, she had no fear.

'At the utmost he could but kill me,' she thought with a little contemptuous derision; 'and that would not matter very much. No Herbert of the Border was ever insulted yet.'

She walked over the grass above the sea, where the rose thickets grew, and the whole coast could be seen from Honfleur to the Rochers de Calvados. It was rather a rampart than a terrace, and the waves beat and fretted the wall below.

It was only nine o'clock; no one except herself rose so early at Félicité.

As she walked a stone fell at her feet. A letter was tied to it. Instinctively she took it up, and on the note she read her own name. She hesitated a moment, then opened it. The writing she did not know. It was very brief, and only said:

'Mademoiselle Noisette was called to Paris last night. The Princess Zouroff is entreated by a humble well-wisher not to disturb herself any more on this matter. She can honour the Kermesse in safety.'

Vere read it, and stood still in wonder. Could it be from the actress herself?

The writing was that of a man, elegant, free, and clear.

She leaned over the grey stone wall of the garden and searched the shore with her eyes. In a little skiff was a fisherman rowing hard. She called to him but he did not hear, or would not hear. She did not see his face, as it was bent over the oars. 'He must have thrown me the letter,' she thought.

She felt rather annoyed than relieved. She would have been glad to have had cause to strike the blow in public; she was weary of bearing patiently and in silence the faithless life of Zouroff.

'If it be true, I am sorry,' she thought doubtfully, and then felt angered that anyone should presume so to address her, and

tore the note in two and threw it in the sea below.

She went and paid her morning visit to her horses, to her hot-houses, to the rest of the gardens, and at eleven returned with neither haste nor interest to the house.

People were just downstairs; being a little earlier that day by reason of the Kermesse. The Duchesse Jeanne—already in her Flemish dress with wonderful gold ornaments that she had bought once of a Mechlin peasant, an exquisite high cap, and bright red stockings and real sabots—was very eagerly chattering, explaining, laughing, frowning, vociferating.

Zouroff stood behind her, his brows as dark as a thunder-cloud.

When his wife came in sight a silence fell upon the group about the wooden shoes of the duchesse.

Madame Nelaguine, whose grace of tact never deserted her, turned and said easily and indifferently to Vere:

'There is a great revolution in our toy kingdom, Vera. Mademoiselle Noisette, the

actress, was called to Paris by the first train this morning. The loss is irreparable, they say, for no one could act Punch with a handkerchief and a penny whistle like this famous person.'

Vere was silent; those who watched her countenance could see no change in it. She felt for the moment both anger and disappointment, but she showed neither.

Zouroff's face was very sullen. For the first time in his life he had been baffled.

'To whom do you accord the pavilion?' Vere said very quietly to the duchesse, who shrugged her shoulders, and raised her eyebrows in a gesture of despair.

'The committee at Trouville will have arranged it,' she answered. 'There has been no time to consult us.'

Vere said in a low tone to her sister-in-law: 'This is true? Not a trick?'

'Quite true, thank heaven!' said Madame Nelaguine. 'I have seen the telegram—you can see it; her director has a new *pensionnaire* who is to play in her own great part, Julie

Malmaison; she was beside herself they say; quite raving; nothing would keep her.'

At that moment a note was taken to the Duchesse Jeanne, who read it and then leapt for joy in her red stockings and her wooden shoes. It was from one of her male committee, who wrote from the Union Club at Trouville.

'Corrèze has come,' she shouted. 'He was here an hour or two yesterday, and promised them to return for the fair, and he has returned, and they have got him to take Noisette's place! Oh dear! the pity that we did not have the Mass!—but he is inimitable at a fair, he always can sell any rubbish for millions; and as a *diseur de bonnes aventures* he is too perfect!'

A slight colour came into Vere's cheeks, which Madame de Sonnaz noticed, although no one else did. Vere understood now who had penned the letter; who had been the fisher rowing.

She was bewildered and astonished; yet life seemed a lovelier thing than it had seemed possible to her a few hours before that it ever could look in her sight.

Sergius Zouroff said nothing; he had been baffled, and he did not know with whom to quarrel for his defeat. He said nothing to his wife, but when his eyes glanced at her they were very savage, dull, and dark. He would have given half his fortune to have had Noisette still in Trouville.

'Dearest Princess,' whispered Madame de Sonnaz to her, taking her aside; 'now this woman is so providentially gone you will come, won't you? *Pray* do not make a scene; your husband is more than sufficiently annoyed as it is. It was all my fault. I ought to have objected more strongly to the permission to hold her pavilion, but you see the world is so indifferent nowadays, and indeed—indeed—I never fancied you *knew*.'

A glow of impatient colour flushed Vere's face. She could bear her husband's infidelities, but she could not endure to hear them alluded to by another woman.

'I will come,' she said briefly, 'if you think it will prevent any annoyance. The sole object of life seems to be to avoid what you all call "scenes."'

'Of course it is men's,' said Madame Jeanne. 'Women like scenes, but men hate them; probably because they are always in the wrong, and always get the worst of them. I entirely felt with you about Mademoiselle Noisette, but I don't think I should have done as you did, spoken as you spoke. It is never worth while. Believe me it never makes the smallest atom of difference.'

'Who told you what I did, what I said?' asked Vere suddenly, looking her friend full in the eyes.

Madame de Sonnaz was, for the moment, a little disconcerted.

'Only two people knew,' said Vere; 'Nadine and her brother.'

'It was not Nadine,' said the duchesse, recovering her composure, and laughing a very little. 'You ought to know by this time, Vera —I may call you Vera?—that your husband has very few secrets from me. Sergius and I have been friends, so long—so horribly long, it makes me feel quite old to count the years since I saw him first driving his Orloffs down

the Bois. *O, le beau temps!* Morny was not dead, Paris was not republican, hair was not worn flat, realism was not invented, and I was not twenty. *O, le beau temps!* Yes, Sergius told me all about the scene you had made him —he called it a scene; I told him it was proper feeling and a compliment to him, and he was extremely angry, and I was wretched at my own thoughtlessness. My dear, you are so young; you make mistakes; you should never let a man think you are jealous, if you are so.'

'Jealous!' All the blood of the Herberts of the Border leaped to fire in Vere's veins. As she turned her face upon Madame de Sonnaz with unutterable scorn and indignation on it, the elder woman did that homage to her beauty which a rival renders so reluctantly, but which is truer testimony to its power than all a lover's praise. Madame Jeanne gave a little teazing laugh.

'Jealous, my fairest! why, yes. If you were not jealous why should you have insisted on the woman's absence?'

'There can be no jealousy where there is

only abhorrence,' Vere said quickly, with her teeth shut. 'You do not seem to understand; one resents insults for oneself. An insult like that is to a woman like the insult that a blow is to a man.'

Madame Jeanne shrugged her shoulders.

'My love! Then we are all black and blue *nous autres*. Of course in theory you are quite right, but in practice no one feels in such a way; or, if anyone feels, she says nothing. But we will not discuss it. The woman is away. You must come now, because you said you would occupy your pavilion if hers were taken down. We do not take it down because there is not time; but we have given it to Corrèze. You know him—in society I mean? I think so?'

'Scarcely,' said Vere; and she felt a glow of colour come over her face because she was sure that the note had come from him, and that the fisher pulling his boat had been one and the same as the luteplayer of Venice.

'She has known him, and she does not want me,' thought Madame Jeanne, swift to

observe, swift to infer, and, like all experienced people, always apt to make the worst deductions.

But the bells of the horses, harnessed like Flemish teams to the breaks and other carriages, were jingling in the avenue, and the tasselled and ribboned postilions were cracking their whips. There was little time to be lost, and she reluctantly let Vere escape her. As she drove along with Sergius Zouroff in his mail phaeton to Trouville, she gave him her own version of Vere's conversation. She exaggerated some things and softened others; she gave him full cause to feel that his wife abhorred him, but she said nothing of Corrèze, because she was a prudent tactician, and never touched a fruit till it was ripe to fall.

'It was possibly merely my fancy,' she reflected, as in all the whirl of her lottery, and all the pressure of her admiring throng, she found time to cast many glances at the tent of Corrèze, and saw that he was never beside his opposite neighbour. He was everywhere else—a miracle of persuasiveness, a king of caprice, the very perfection of a seller and a showman, dealing

in children's toys with half the shops of the Palais Royal emptied into his booth, and always surrounded by a crowd of children, on whom he rained showers of sparkling sweetmeats—but he was never beside the Princess Zouroff. He had taken down the pennon of Noisette, and in its stead was one with his own device; a Love whose wings were caught in a thorny rose-bush. He told fortunes, he made himself a clairvoyant, he mystified his clients, and made them happy. He was dressed like a Savoyard, and carried an old ivory guitar, and sang strange, sweet, little ditties in a dulcet falsetto. He was the Haroun al Raschid of the Trouville Kermesse, and poured gold into its treasuries by the magic of his name and his voice, the contagion of his laughter and his gaiety. But he never once approached the Princess Zouroff; and no one could tell that, as he roamed about, with his five-year-old adorers flocking after him, or prophesied from a bowl of water the destinies of fair women, in his heart he was always saying, 'Oh, my wild white rose! Why did I not gather you and

keep you while I could. You are a great lady, and they all envy you, and all the while you are outraged and desolate!'

Vere sat in her azure pavilion, and looked fitter to be a Lily of Astolat presiding at a tournament of knights. She bought most of her own things herself, and gave them away to children.

The sun was strong, the heat was great, the chatter, the clamour, the many mingling and dissonant sounds, made her head ache, and the bright rainbow-like semicircle of tents, and the many colours of the changing multitude, often swam as in a mist before her eyes.

Could it, after all, have been he who had warned her? she began to doubt. It was too improbable. Why should he care? She told herself that she had been conjecturing a vain and baseless thing. Why should he care?

He was merely there, in the pavilion that was to have been Noisette's, because, no doubt, all artistes were his comrades; and he replaced the actress from the same good fellowship as he sold roses at Madame Lilas' stall, and ivory

carvings at Cécile Challon's. It could have been nothing more.

He never approached her. She could see his graceful head and throat above the throng, as he sold his puppets and his playthings; she could hear the thrill of his guitar, the echo of his voice, the delighted shouts of his child-troop, the laughter with which women pelted him with flowers as in Carnival time; she could see him nearly all day long, as he stood under Noisette's rosy garlands, or wandered with jest and compliment through the fair. But to her he never came. At sunset he was missing. The flag, with the Love caught in the thorns of the roses, was down; a negro stood like a statue cut in ebony between the pink curtains of Noisette's tent. It was a slave of Soudan who had long been a free man in his service; a picturesque figure, well-known to Paris. He did not speak, but he had a scroll in his hands, a scroll that hung down, and on which was written, '*Désolé de vous quitter, mais un pauvre luthier n'est pas maître de soi-même.*'

'It was charming of Corrèze,' said Madame

de Sonnaz. 'Very charming of him. He had only twenty-four hours his own between the last night at Covent Garden and the royal fêtes in Brussels. And he spent those twenty-four hours in answering my call and coming to help our Kermesse. He is gone to Belgium to-night. It was really charming. And the use he has been! the impetus he gave! the money he has got for us! I shall always be grateful to him.'

Whilst she spoke, she thought nevertheless, 'It is very eloquent that he should never have gone near her. They must understand each other very well, if at all. He never took all that trouble for nothing, and no mere accident could have been so perfectly *àpropos*.'

The house party and the host of Félicité dined at ten o'clock that night with her at the Châlet Ludoff.

Vere, pleading great fatigue, drove homeward in the pale moonlight, through the cool air, sweet with the scent of the apple-orchards and the sea. Madame Nelaguine accompanied her: neither spoke.

In Paris at that hour Mademoiselle Noisette, arriving hot with the sun, enraged with the dust, furious at leaving Trouville, and ready for murder if she could not have vengeance, burst, as the hurricane and the storm burst over lake and mountain, into the peaceful retreat where the director of her theatre passed his leisure moments, and found that there was no new *pensionnaire* to play Julie Malmaison; that her greatness was on the same unapproachable pinnacle it had occupied ever since her *début*; that her director and her public alike were the most loyal and submissive of slaves; that, in a word, she had been hoaxed.

'*Qui donc à voulu me mystifier!*' she screamed a thousand times, and plunged into abysses of suspicion, and was only pacified by promises of the Chef de Sûreté and his myrmidons. But she stormed, raged, cursed, wept, foamed at the mouth for half an hour, and then —forgot the Prefet de Police, and let herself be taken down to Enghien-les-Bains in time for dinner by a German Margrave, whom she

pillaged from patriotism, and with whom she stayed a whole week.

The Duchess Jeanne, excruciatingly tired as she was the next morning, felt her spirits good, and her limbs elastic, as she got into her red and black stripes and a red cap—*vrai bonnet rouge*, as she said—and displayed her skill in the waters of Trouville, and on them with her canoe. She had got a clue to follow; a mere misty, intangible thread at present, but still something on which to spin her web.

'Corrèze was the hero of the adventure of the lost shoes and stockings, and what adventure is ever so sweet in a woman's life as the first?' thought this experienced being, as she lay stretched out on the waves, or made her canoe shoot over them. 'Corrèze comes for a few hours down here; that very day she drives off before we are up, and makes her pilgrimage to the place of the lost shoes; when we interrogate her she colours and grows angry; he takes Noisette's pavilion—Noisette's, whom he detests—I have heard artists say so a hundred times. He is charming, he is ex-

quisite, he is adorable; and all within a few yards of Vere, to whom he nevertheless never speaks! Something there must be. The thing to do is to bring them near one another; then one would see, inevitably.'

And, lying on her back on the sunny water, she resolved to do so. What did she want? She did not know precisely. She wanted to do what the moths do to ermine.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PRETTY green Ischl was growing dusky in the evening hours.

Ischl, like a young girl, is prettiest in the morning. Its morning light is radiant and sweet; of the sunset it sees little or nothing, and its evenings are sad-coloured; the moon seems a long time coming up over these heights of pine-forest, but, when it does come, it is very fair, shining on the ripple of the rapid Traun with the lights of the houses on the banks twinkling in the moss-green surface of the stream, with every now and then a gentle splash breaking the silence as the ferry-boat

goes over from side to side, or a washing-barge is moored in closer to the shore.

Ischl is calm, and sedate, and simple, and decorous. Ischl is like some tender fair wholesome yet patrician beauty in a German picture, like the pretty aristocratic Charlotte in Kaulbach's picture, who cuts the bread and butter, yet looks a patrician. Ischl has nothing of the *belle petite*, like her sister of Baden, nothing of the titled *cocodette* like her cousin of Monaco. Ischl does not gamble, or riot, or conduct herself madly in any way; she is a little old-fashioned still, in a courtly way; she has a little rusticity still in her elegant manners; she is homely whilst she is so visibly of the *fine fleur* of the *vieille souche*.

She is like the noble dames of the past ages, who were so high of rank and so proud of habit, yet were not above the distilling-room and the spinning-wheel, who were quiet, serious, sweet, and smelt of the rose leaves with which they filled their big jars.

Ischl goes early to bed and early rises.

It was quite quiet on this August evening.

It was very full, but its throng was a polite and decorous one. Groups walked noiselessly up and down under the trees of the esplanade; music had long ago ceased from sounding; men and women sat out on the balconies with dimly-lit chambers behind them; but there was no louder sound than a dog's bark, or a girl's laughter, or the swish of an oar in the river.

From the road of the north-east, and over the grey bridge, with its canopied saint, there came suddenly, with a sound of trampling hoofs, whips cracking in air, and clanging post horns, that harshly broke the repose of the twilight hour, a travelling carriage with four horses, containg two ladies and a dog.

The carriage had come from Salzburg. It was open, for the night was mild, and, as a miracle of kindness, did not rain. A man, leaning in a casement of the Kaiserinn Elizabeth, recognised both ladies and dog as the heavy landau rolled off the bridge across the road, then disappeared round the corner of the building. It was followed by another carriage full of

servants. The host of the Kaiserinn Elizabeth with all his officials small and great, precipitated themselves into the street, bowing bareheaded, as the fiery horses were pulled up before the door.

The quick twilight fell; the valleys from dusky grew dark; the Traunwater began to look like a shoal of emeralds under the sunrays; a white round moon began to show itself behind the hills; the forms of people walking on the banks became indistinct, though the murmur of their voices and laughter grew clearer; otherwise it was so still that he who leaned over his balcony and saw the carriage arrive, could hear the swish of the barge-ropes as the water moved them, and the sound of a big dog lapping in the river underneath him.

'It is destiny!' he said to himself. 'For two whole years I have avoided her, and fate, taking the shape of our physicians, sends us here!'

He leaned over the balcony, and watched the water flow under the shadows of the houses and the trees.

'Is it Duchesse Jeanne's doing?' he thought, with that unreasoning instinct which in some men and women guides their fancy to true conclusions. 'That is nonsense, though; what can she know? And yet I remember, at that ball, after the *Nuit de Mai*, she seemed to suspect something. She laughed; she told me I alone could thaw ice——'

At that moment an Austrian march, stoutly brayed under the windows of the Kaiserinn Elizabeth seemed to his ears to fill the night with discord.

He started to his feet with impatience and in suffering, as the sounds grated in his ears, and rapidly shut his windows one after another, to exclude the sound.

'Where is Anatole?' he muttered irritably, as he paced the dull chambers allotted to him. He had arrived only twenty minutes earlier from Linz. He had not given his name, and for once found a spot where he was not known by sight to all. Instead of his servant, Anatole, one of the servants of the hotel tapped at the door, and, entering his chamber which he him-

self had only entered a few minutes before, presented him, with many apologies, a printed document to sign. It was the schedule and exordium with which Ischl, in childlike faith in the integrity of humanity—or astute faith in its snobbery—requires from each of her visitors his declaration of rank and riches, and fines him that he may support her promenades and her trinkhalle according to his social means and place.

He glanced at the paper absently, then took up his pen. Under the head of residence, he wrote *Un peu partout*; under that of rank he wrote *artiste*, and under that which required the declaration of his name he wrote '*Corrèze.*'

Then he threw down five napoleons to pay his fees. 'A droll document,' he said, as he pushed it away. 'It displays great astuteness; it never yet found, I am sure, anybody who sought immunity from its tax by declaring himself *d'un rang inférieur, et hors de société.* Really, your tax-paper does credit to the municipal knowledge of human nature.'

The waiter smiled and took up the gold.

'Monsieur gives this for the good of the town?'

'For the good of the town or the good of yourself,' said Corrèze; 'according as altruism or acquisitiveness prevails in your organisation.'

The waiter, perplexed, bowed and pocketed the money.

'Wait a moment. Shall I hear this noise every evening?'

'The noise?' The waiter was perplexed.

'You call it music, perhaps,' said Corrèze. 'If I cannot have my windows open without hearing it I must go up into the mountains.'

'Monsieur will hear it seldom,' said the waiter. 'It is the *chapelle de musique*; it serenades royal personages; but monsieur will understand that such do not come every day.'

'It is to be hoped not, if they have ears,' said Corrèze. 'Who is it that they are serenading now?'

'The Princess Zouroff has arrived.'

'She is not royal.'

'That is true, monsieur; but almost. The Prince Zouroff is so very rich, so very great.'

'He is not here?'

'No, monsieur.'

'What rooms do they give her?'

'Those immediately beneath monsieur. If they had not been engaged for the princess, monsieur should have had them,' said the youth, feeling that this princely artist should be lodged like an ambassador.

'These do very well,' said Corrèze. 'I shall not change them. You may go now. Order my dinner for nine o'clock, and send me my own man.'

Silence had come again, and the *chapelle de musique* had gone its way after its last burst of that melody which the great singer called noise. The stillness was only broken by the sound of a boat passing, and the murmur of voices from people sauntering underneath.

Corrèze threw himself into a chair that stood in the centre of the room.

'I have honestly tried to avoid her,' he said to himself. 'It is Fate!'

His old and tried servant, Anatole, entered,

and began to unpack his things. Corrèze raised his head.

'Put the guitar out,' he said, 'and then go down and see the cook, and preserve me from what ills you can; you know what it is to dine where German is spoken.'

Anatole took out the guitar-case and placed it by his master, then went obediently.

He opened one of the casements and looked out; it had become almost dark; the tranquil pastoral loveliness was calm and dusky; lights twinkled on the opposite bank and up amongst the woods; the nearer casements were bright and ruddy above the stream; the murmur of voices came from under the indistinct leafy masses of the trees on the esplanade; the sound of oars in water made a pleasant ripple. It was a little too much like one of the scenes of his own theatres to please him perfectly; he preferred wilder scenery, more solitary places; at Ischl the glaciers and the ice-peaks, though really near, seem far away, and are seen but by glimpses. Yet it was so quiet, so innocent, so idyllic, it touched and soothed him.

'After all,' he thought, 'how much we lose in that hot-house we call the great world.'

There was a balcony to his chamber. He leaned over it and looked down into the one beneath; there the dog, Loris, was lying, the starlight shining on his silver-grey hair; beside him on a chair there were a bouquet of Alpine roses and a large black fan.

Corrèze felt his pulse beat quicker.

'Kismet!' he said to himself, and the dreamy charm of a romantic fatalism began to steal on him. Pure accident has the ruling of most of our hours, but, in concession to our weakness or to our pride, we call it destiny, and we like to think its caprices are commands.

'Now she shall have a serenade in truth; a better welcome than from the *chapelle de musique*,' he said to himself, and withdrew into his own room and took the guitar out of its case—a large Spanish guitar that he never travelled without, considering its melody a far better accompaniment for the voice than any piano could ever be. The organ has all the music of the spheres, and the violin all the

emotions of the human heart; the organ is prayer, the violin is sorrow. The guitar, though but a light thing, has passion in it; passion and tenderness and all the caress of love; and, to those who have grown to care for it under southern skies and summer stars, it speaks of love and sighs for it; it has told its tale so often where the fireflies flash amongst the lemon blossoms and the myrtle.

He took up his guitar, and blew out all the many wax candles lighted in his honour, and sat down in the darkness of his chamber.

Then he began to sing; such song as no bribe could get from his lips unless he were in the mood to give it.

Scarcely had the first notes of that incomparable voice rung out clear as a golden bell upon the silent night, than the people sauntering on the bridge and before the hotel, paused to listen, and turned to one another, wondering and entranced.

'Who is that?' they cried to one another, and some one answered, 'They say Corrèze came to-night.' Then they were quiet, listening,

as in the north, where nightingales are few, people listen to them. Then several others from farther down and farther up the street joined them, and people came from under the trees, and from over the bridge; and soon a little crowd was gathered there, silent, delighted, and intent.

'It is Corrèze at his studies,' the people said one to another; and his voice, rising in its wonderful diapason clearer and clearer, higher and higher, rang over the water, and held all its hearers spell-bound. As a boat passed down the river the rowers paused; and as a long raft pushed its slow way through the silver of the moonlit ripples, the steersman unbidden, checked it, and remained still, lest any sound of rope or of chain should break the charm.

The Princess Zouroff, wearily resting in the salon beneath him, started as the first notes reached her, and rose to her feet and listened, her heart beating fast.

There was no other such voice in all the world. She knew that he was there as well as

though she had seen his face. She went to the balcony and stepped out into the moonlight where the dog was, and the roses and the fan were on the chair, and leaned against the balustrade—a slender white figure with ermine drawn about her, and the moon rays shedding their silver around.

He was singing the 'Salve Dimara.'

She grew very pale, and her fingers grasped the rail of the balcony till her rings hurt her skin.

Yet how happy she was!

The river ran by, with a sweet song of its own; the tranquil town seemed to sleep; the people gathered below were hushed and reverent; the fresh glad wind that lives in Alpine forests swept by, bringing the scent of the pine-wood with it.

He sang on, the chords of the guitar filling the pauses of the voice with a low dulcet sound, as if some answering echo sighed. The perfect melody was poured out as from some wild bird's throat, seeming to thrill through the darkness and make it living and beautiful like the

shadows of a night that veils the ecstasies of Love. She listened with her head bent and her face very pale. It was her welcome, and she felt that it was for her: for her alone.

He sang the 'Salve Dimara' of that living master, who, whatever his weakness or his fault, has in his music that echo of human passion and of mortal pain, which more faultless composers, with their purer science, have missed. Then scarcely pausing, he sang from the music of the 'Fidelio' and the 'Iphigenia,' music familiar and beloved with him as any cradle-song to a child; and he let all his heart go out in his voice, that poured itself into the silence of the summer evening, as though, like the nightingales, he sang because his heart would break if he were silent. Then, last of all, he sang his favourite song of Heine: the song of the palm-tree and the pine.

Suddenly, with one deep plaintive chord of the guitar, as if its strings were breaking with that last sweet sigh, his voice ceased; as the nightingale's may cease all at once, when, amidst the roses, it tires of its very plenitude

of power. There was the sound of a closing casement, then all was still.

The people, standing entranced below, were silent a moment or two, still in the trance of their wonder and delight; then, with one accord, they shouted his name with such a welcome as they never gave but to their own Kaiser. The Kaiser was great, but even he could not command that voice at will; and they had had the sweetness and the splendour of it all to themselves here, by the quiet Traun water, as if it were a bird's song and no more.

They cheered him so loudly, and so loudly called on his name, that he could do no less than advance on his balcony, and thank them in their own tongue. Then he bade them good-night, and once more closed his window.

Below, Vere stood quite still, leaning back in the low chair with her fan spread between her face and the upraised eyes of the people. She felt tears fall slowly down her cheeks. Yet she was almost happy.

The fresh forest wind, rising and blowing the

green moonlit water into rippling silver, seemed to echo around her the song of Heine; the song of the palm-tree and the pine.

The gay brusque tones of Jeanne de Sonnaz roused her almost roughly; the duchess came out on to the balcony, muffled in a cloak of golden feathers.

'*Ma chère*, how charming! Of course you recognised the voice? and, to make sure, I sent the servants to ask. Now we shall never be dull. No one is dull where Corrèze can be seen. It is too charming! And how divinely he sang. I suppose he was only studying; though he must know all those things by heart. Perhaps he has heard we are underneath him.'

She spoke in apparent ignorance and surprise, heedlessly and gaily, but her quick eyes read a look that came into Vere's, and for which she was searching. When she had suggested Ischl in August to Zouroff for his wife, she had known from Vienna that Corrèze was to pass through there.

'I do believe it is as I thought,' said Jeanne de Sonnaz to herself. 'Is it possible that *le*

bon diable has found the *petite entrée* after all? It would be diverting—and why not?'

When all Ischl awoke the next morning, the day was brilliant; the green river sparkled; coffee-cups tinkled on all the balconies; the washing barges were full of white linen, and of women who laughed as they worked; ladies, old and young, were borne down the walk in their chairs; the little red and white ferry-boat trailed along its rope, leaving a track of sunshine; dogs swam; children ran about; pretty women, with high heels and high canes, sauntered under the trees; green and grey huntsmen went by, going towards the hills to slay izard and roebuck. It was all sylvan, tranquil, picturesque, Watteau-like. That there could be anywhere a world full of revolution, speculation, poverty, socialism, haste and noise, seemed impossible.

At Ischl life may be still a *voyage à Cythère*; but not in the reckless and frivolous fashion of other places. All remains calm, placid, and touched with the graceful decorum of another time than ours. The bright Viennese are gay

indeed, as any butterflies can be; but still Ischl is Ischl, and not Trouville, not Monaco, not Biarritz. It is aristocratic, Austrian, and tranquil; and still belongs to an age in which Nihilism and the electric light were unknown.

'A place to doze and dream in, and how good that is!' thought Corrèze, as he stood out on his balcony an hour after sunrise. 'What will the world be like when there are no such places? Horrible! but I shall be out of it; that is a supreme comfort.'

Yet, as he thought, so he did not realise that he would ever cease to be in the world—who does? Life was still young in him, was prodigal to him of good gifts, of enmity he only knew so much as made his triumph finer, and of love he had more than enough. His life was full—at times laborious—but always poetical and always victorious. He could not realise that the day of darkness would ever come for him, when neither woman nor man would delight him, when no roses would have fragrance for him, and no song any spell to rouse him. Genius gives immortality in another way than

in the vulgar one of being praised by others after death; it gives elasticity, unwearied sympathy, and that sense of some essence stronger than death, of some spirit higher than the tomb, which nothing can destroy. It is in this sense that genius walks with the immortals.

Corrèze leaned over his balcony, and watched the emerald-hued Traun flow by, and the sun's rays touch the woods behind the water-mill upon the left. His life was of the world and in it, but the mountaineer's love of nature remained with him. But it was not of the woods or the waters, or even of the pretty women who went by in their chairs to the Trinkhalle, that he was thinking now. He was looking at the empty chair in the balcony underneath, and the fan that had lain there all night.

As he bent down and looked, a knot of edelweiss was flung upward, and fell at his feet, and a voice that he knew cried out to him, 'Good morning, Corrèze! You serenaded us divinely last night. Come and breakfast with us at ten o'clock. We live by cock-crow here.'

The voice was the voice of Jeanne de Sonnaz, who came out on to the balcony that he had been told was Vere's. Astonished, and not pleased, he returned some graceful compliment, and wondered how it was that she was there.

The duchesse looked up at him and laughed; her ugly face looked prettier than many pretty women's. She was in a loose white gown that was all torrents and cascades of lace; she had a real moss-rose over her right ear, and at her bosom; she had little Chinese slippers on, all over pearls, with filagree butterflies that trembled above her toes.

'I cannot see you without craning my neck,' she cried to him. 'You will come to breakfast. You will meet Vera Zouroff. You know her. Doctors say she is ill. I cannot see it. There was only one big salon free, so she and I have shared it. A pretty place. Were you here before? A little too like your own *décor de scène*? Well, perhaps, a valley with a river and châlets always has that look —Ems has it. I think it is terribly dull. I

am glad you are here. Come to us at ten. We are all alone. I shall expect you to amuse us.'

Corrèze said some pretty nothings with that grace which charmed all women; they talked a little of people they knew, laughed a little, and were very agreeable. Then the duchesse went within, and Corrèze went for a stroll towards the Rettenbach mill.

'Now I shall see what there is between them,' she said to herself; and he said to himself, 'How can that brute let her be with Jeanne de Sonnaz?'

Vere, tired, and having had sweet strange disturbed dreams, had slept later than her wont, then had gone out to the bath and the draught prescribed to her; she thought they were useless; she felt well.

Some one dressed in white linen passed her, and bowed low: it was Corrèze. There was a child selling mountain flowers; she bought them and carried them on her knee; the polite crowd looked after her chair and whispered her name.

The band was playing under the trees; she did not hear it; she heard only the song of Heine.

When she returned there was almost a colour in her cheeks; she had a gown of white wool stuff and a silver girdle of old German work that had a silver missal hung on it.

'You look like Nillson's Marguerite!' said Jeanne de Sonnaz; 'only you are too lovely and too haughty for that, my dear. By the way, I have secured Faust. He will come to breakfast.'

'M. de Corrèze?' said Vere with the colour leaving her face. 'Why? why?—why did you ask him?'

'I asked him because it pleased me, because he is charming, because he serenaded us exquisitely; there are a hundred "becauses." You need not be alarmed, my love; Corrèze goes everywhere. He is a gentleman, though he is a singer. We always treat him so.'

Vere said nothing; she was angered with herself that she had seemed to slight him, and she was uncertain how to reply aught.

The sharp eyes of the Duchesse Jeanne watched her, and, as worldly-wise eyes are apt to do, saw very much that did not exist to be seen.

Vere stood mute, arranging her mountain flowers.

The servants announced Corrèze.

Vere was not conscious of the trouble, the gladness, the vague apprehension, and as vague hope, that her face expressed; and which Jeanne de Sonnaz construed according to her own light, and Corrèze according to his.

'What will that *diablesse* think?' he said angrily to himself. 'A hundred thousand things that are not, and never will be true!'

For his own part, the world had taught him very well how to conceal his feelings when he chose, and, in his caressing grace, that was much the same to all women, he had an impenetrable mask. But Vere had none. Vere was transparent as only a perfectly innocent creature ever is; and the merciless eyes of Jeanne de Sonnaz were on them.

'You know the Princess Zouroff, I think?'

said the latter negligently. 'Was it Vera, or was it myself, that you serenaded so beautifully. An indiscreet question; but you know I am always indiscreet.'

'Madame,' said Corrèze whilst he bowed before Vere, and then turned to answer his tormentor, 'truth is always costly, but it is always best. At the risk of your displeasure I must confess that I sang on no other sentiment than perfect exasperation with the *chapelle de musique*. That I serenaded yourself and Princess Zouroff was an accidental honour that I scarcely deserved to enjoy.'

'What a pretty falsehood, and how nicely turned,' thought Madame de Sonnaz, as she pursued persistently: 'Then Vera was right; she said you did not know we were here. Nevertheless, you and she are old friends, I think, surely?

Corrèze had taken his seat between them; he was close to the duchesse; there was a little distance between him and Vere, whose eyes were always on the flowers that employed her fingers.

'I knew Madame la Princesse a little, very little, when she was a child,' he said with a smile. 'Neither acquaintances nor court presentations before marriage count after it, I fear. Princess Vera at that time had a sailor hat and no shoes—you see it is a very long time ago.'

Vere looked up a moment and smiled. Then the smile died away into a great sadness. It was long ago, indeed, so long that it seemed to her as though a whole lifetime severed her, the wife of Sergius Zouroff, from the happy child that had taken the rose from the hand of Corrèze.

'No shoes! This is interesting. I suppose they were dredging, and she had lost herself. Tell me all about it,' said the high voice of Duchess Jeanne; and Corrèze told her in his own airy graceful fashion, and made her laugh.

'If I did not tell her something, God knows what she would conjecture,' he said to himself; and then he sat down to the breakfast-table beside the open windows, and made himself charming in a gay and witty way that made

the duchess think to herself: 'She is in love, but he is not.'

Vere sat almost silent. She could not imitate his *insouciance*, his gaiety, his abandonment to the immediate hour, the skill with which he made apparent frankness serve as entire concealment.

She sat in a sort of trance, only hearing the rich sweet cadence of the voice whose mere laughter was music, and whose mere murmur was a caress.

The sunshine and the green water glancing through the spaces of the blinds, the pretty quaint figures moving up and down under the trees on the opposite bank; the scent of the mountain strawberries and the Alpine flowers; the fragrance of the pine-woods filling the air; the voice of Corrèze, melodious even in its laughter, crossed by the clear harsh imperious tones of Jeanne de Sonnaz; all seemed to Vere like the scenes and the sounds of a dream, all blent together into a sweet confusion of sunshine and shade; of silver speech and golden silence.

She had longed to meet him; she had dreaded to meet him. Month after month her heart had yearned and her courage had quailed; his eyes had said so much, and his lips had said nothing. They had been strangers so long, and now, all in a moment, he was sitting at her table in familiar intimacy, he who had sung the *Prière* of Sully Prudhomme.

Her eyes shone with unaccustomed light; her serious lips had a smile trembling on them; the coldness and the stillness which were not natural to her years, gradually changed and melted, as the snow before the sunbeams of summer; yet she felt restless and apprehensive. She wondered what he thought of her; if he condemned her in haste, as one amongst the many bought by a brilliant and loveless marriage; if he believed that the moth had forgotten the star and dropped to mere earthly fire?

She could not tell.

Corrèze was not the Saint Raphael who had given her the rose; he was the Corrèze of Paris, witty, brilliant, careless, worldly-wise,

bent on amusing and disarming the Duchesse de Sonnaz.

Vere, who knew nothing of his motive, or of her peril, felt a chill of faint, intangible disappointment. She herself had no duality of nature; she had nothing of the flexible changeful, many-sided temper of the artist; she was always Vere, whether she pleased or displeased, whether she were happy or unhappy; whether she were with king or peasant she was always what she had been born; always Vere Herbert, never Vera Zouroff, though church and law had called her so.

'She is like a pearl,' thought Corrèze, watching her; 'she has nothing of the opal or the diamond; she does not depend on light; she never changes or borrows colour; she is like a pearl; nothing alters the pearl—till you throw it into the acid.'

Meanwhile, as he thought so, he was making Jeanne de Sonnaz shed tears of inextinguishable laughter at stories of his friends of the Comédie Français; for in common with all great ladies, her appetite was insatiable for

anecdotes of the women whom she would not have visited, yet whom she copied, studied, and, though she would not have confessed it, often envied.

'*Le diable est entré,*' thought the Duchesse Jeanne, ruffling the moss-rose amidst her lace, amused.

'*Le diable n'entrera jamais,*' thought Corrèze, who guessed very nearly what she was thinking.

Vere was almost always silent. Every now and then she found his soft, pensive eyes looking at her, and then she looked away, and her face grew warm.

What did he think of her? she was asking herself uneasily; he, who had bidden her keep herself unspotted from the world; he who had sent her the parable of the moth and the star, he, who filled her thoughts and absorbed her life more absolutely than she had any idea of, had said nothing to her since the day he had bade her farewell at Trouville.

Corrèze answered her in the same strain; and Vere listened, trying to detect in this gay and amiably cynical man of the world the

saviour of Père Martin, the artist of the lyric drama, the hero of all her innocent memories and dreams. He was more kindred to her ideal when he grew more in earnest, and spoke of himself and his own art in answer to Jeanne de Sonnaz, who reproached him with apathy to the claims of Berlioz.

'No!' he said with some warmth; 'I refuse to recognise the divinity of noise; I utterly deny the majesty of monster choruses; clamour and clangour are the death-knell of music, as drapery and so-called realism (which means, if it mean aught, that the dress is more real than the form underneath it!) are the destruction of sculpture. It is very strange. Every day art in every other way becomes more natural and music more artificial. Every day I wake up expecting to hear myself *dénigré* and denounced as old-fashioned, because I sing as my nature as well as my training teaches me to do. It is very odd; there is such a cry for naturalism in other arts—we have Millet instead of Claude; we have Zola instead of George Sand; we have Dumas *fils* instead of

Corneille; we have Mercié instead of Canova; but in music we have precisely the reverse, and we have the elephantine creations, the elaborate and pompous combinations of Baireuth, and the Tone school, instead of the old sweet strains of melody that went straight and clear to the ear and the heart of man. Sometimes my enemies write in their journals that I sing as if I were a Tuscan peasant strolling through his corn—how proud they make me! But they do not mean to do so. I will not twist and emphasize. I trust to melody. I was taught music in its own country, and I will not sin against the canons of the Italians. They are right. Rhetoric is one thing, and song is another. Why confuse the two? Simplicity is the soul of great music; as it is the mark of great passions. Ornament is out of place in melody which represents single emotions at their height, be they joy, or fear, or hate, or love, or shame, or vengeance, or whatsoever they will. Music is not a science any more than poetry is. It is a sublime instinct, like genius of all kinds. I sing as

naturally as other men speak; let me remain natural——'

'But you are too strong for it to matter what they say!'

Corrèze shrugged his shoulders.

'I am indifferent. Indifference is always strength. Just now I do as I like, to be sure, and yet I have the world with me. But that is only because I am the fashion. There is so much more of fashion than of fame in our generation. Fame was a grand thing, serious and solemn; the people gave it—such people as ran before Correggio's Madonna, as before a heaven-descended thing, and made Catherine of Sienna a living possibility in their midst. It was a grand guerdon, given in grand times. It is too serious and too stern for us; we have only fashion; a light thing that you crown one day and depose the next; a marsh light born of bad gases that dances up to one one moment, and dances away the next. Well, we have what we are worth; so much is certain.'

'Do you think we always have the fate we merit?' said Vere in a low tone.

Corrèze looked up, and she thought his soft eyes grew stern.

'I have usually thought so, Princess;—yes.'

'It is a cruel doctrine.'

'And a false one? Well—perhaps. So many side-winds blow; so many diseases are in the air; so many wandering insects, here to-day and gone to-morrow, sting the plant and canker it—that is what you mean? To be sure. When the aphis eats the rose it is no fault of the rose.'

'Zouroff is the aphis, I suppose,' thought Jeanne de Sonnaz as she looked at Vere. 'Do not speak in parables, Corrèze. It is detestable. A metaphor always halts somewhere, like an American paper I read last week, which said, "Memphis is sitting in the ashes of woe and desolation, and our stock of groceries is running low!" So Vera complains of fate and you of fame?—what ingratitude!'

'Fame, duchesse!' cried Corrèze. 'Pray do not use such a *gros mot* to me. Michael Angelo has fame, and Cromwell, and Monsieur Edison, but a singer!—we are the most ephe-

meral of all ephemeridæ. We are at best only a sound—just a sound! When we have passed away into "the immemorial silences" there is nothing left of us, no more than of the wind that blew through Corydon's pipe.'

'Monsieur Edison will tell you that Corydon's pipe will be heard a thousand years hence through the skill of science.'

'What horror!' said Corrèze. 'I think I never should have courage to sing another note if I believed that I should echo through all the ages in that way.'

'And yet you say that you want fame.'

'I think I never said that, madame. I said fame is not a gift of our times; and if it were, a singer would have no title to it.'

'You have something very like it at all events. When half a city drags your carriage like a chariot of victory——'

'Caprice, madame; pure caprice,' said Corrèze. 'I have happened for the moment to please them.'

'And what do Cæsars, and Napoleons, and other rulers do?—happen for the moment to

frighten them. Yours is the prettier part to play.'

'A sugar-stick is prettier than a ramrod, but——'

'You do not deserve the Kaiserinn's strawberries,' said Jeanne de Sonnaz, tumbling the big berries nevertheless on to his plate.

'I never deserved anything, but I have had much,' said Corrèze. 'Even Madame de Sonnaz, while she scolds, smiles on me—like Fortune.'

'Madame Vera neither smiles nor scolds,' said the duchess. 'Perhaps she thinks Fortune and I have spoiled you.'

'Perhaps she thinks me beneath both favour and scorn.'

Vere broke biscuits for Loris, and seemed not to have heard. She felt herself colour; for, though she was a great lady, she was still very young. She could not follow his careless, easy banter, and its airy negligence hurt her. If he had sent her the jewelled metaphor of the moth and the star, how could he be altogether indifferent to her fate? She had felt

that the song of Heine had been sung for her; yet now she began to doubt whether the meaning that she had given to it had not been her own delusion; whether the eloquence he had thrown into the German words had not been the mere counterfeit emotion of an artist, the emotion of his Gennaro, of his Edgardo, of his Romeo. It is the doubt with which every artist is wronged by those for whom he feels the most. Vere, as she doubted, felt wounded and disillusioned.

Breakfast ended, the duchesse made him sit out on the balcony under the awning; she made him smoke her cigarettes; she made him tell her more anecdotes of that artist life which she was convinced must be one long holiday, one untiring carnival. Corrèze obeyed, and kept her amused. Vere sat within the window making lace, never caring to have her fingers quite idle.

Her heart had sunk; the shining river and the bright sunshine had grown dull; the old heavy burden of hopelessness and apathy had fallen on her again. She did not find her

Saint Raphael, and she listened with pain as his laugh mingled with the shrill gay tones of the duchesse. Everyone seemed able to be happy, or at least light-hearted, except herself; it must be some fault in her, she thought.

Corrèze, even as his eyes seemed to glance out to the green river, or to fasten admiringly on the *fouillis* and moss-roses of his companion, in reality never ceased to see that figure which sat so still inside the window; with its white gown, its silver girdle, its proud bent head, its slender hands weaving the thread lace.

'My pearl, that they set in a hog's drinking trough!' he thought bitterly. 'Alas, no! not mine! never mine! If only she were at peace it would not matter, but she is not; she never will be; they cannot kill her soul in her, though they try hard.'

'But do they ever really pay Felix for their dresses,' the duchesse was crying; 'Or do they not think, like Sheridan, that to pay any debt is a waste of good money?'

At that moment some Austrians of the Court

were announced—handsome young chamberlains and aides-de-camp—who came to pay their homage to the Princess Zouroff and her friend.

After a little while the duchesse monopolised them, as she had a talent for monopolising most things and most people; and Corrèze, as he took his leave, found himself for one moment alone before Vere's chair.

The duchesse and the Austrians were all out on the balcony, laughing rather noisily, and planning riding parties, dining parties, hunting, boating, and all other means of diversion that the simplicity of Ischl afforded.

Corrèze hesitated a moment, then touched the lace-work on her cushion.

'Work for fairies, Princess,' he said, as his fingers caressed the cobweb of thread.

'Very useless, I am afraid—as useless as the poor fairies are nowadays,' she answered, without looking up from it.

'Useless? Surely not? Is not lace one of the industries of the world?'

'Not as I make it, I think. It is better

than sitting with idle hands, that is all. When I have made a few mètres, then I give them to any poor girl I meet; she could make better herself, but she is generally good-natured enough to be pleased——'

Her voice trembled a little as she spoke. The artist had made so much of her mental and spiritual life all through the past months, that it almost hurt her to have the man before her; to her he was the lover, the poet, the king, the soldier, the prophet, the cavalier of the ideal worlds in which he had become familiar to her. It was an effort to speak tranquilly and indifferently to him as to any other drawing-room idler.

'It would not require much good-nature to be grateful for any thing you gave,' said Corrèze with a smile. 'I am rather learned in lace. I knew old women in Venice who even showed me the old forgotten *point italien*. May I show it to you? It is almost a lost art.'

His fingers, slender and agile, like the fingers of all artists, took up the threads and moved them in and out with skill.

'It is not man's work,' he said, with a little low laugh; 'but then you know I am an artist.'

'You say that as Courcy used to say "*Je suis ni roi ni prince.*"'

'Perhaps! No doubt *les rois et les princes* laughed at Courcy.'

'I do not think they did. Courcy's pride always seemed to me so far above laughter.'

'You do not look at my *point italien*, madame,' said Corrèze.

Instead of looking down at his fingers with the threads on them she looked up and met his eyes. The blood flew into her fair face; she felt confused and bewildered; the frankness of her nature moved her lips.

'I have wanted to tell you always,' she said hurriedly; 'to thank you—you sent me that necklace of the moth and the star?'

Corrèze bowed his head over the lace.

'You forgive my temerity?' he murmured.

'What was there to forgive? It was beautiful, and—and—I understood. But it was not my fault that I sank.'

Then she stopped suddenly; she remem-

bered how much her words implied; she remembered all that they admitted of her marriage.

Corrèze gazed on her in silence. It had been a mystery to him always, a mystery of perplexity and pain, that the innocent, resolute, proud nature which he had discerned in Vere Herbert should have bent so easily and so rapidly under the teaching of her mother to the tempting of the world. Again and again he had said to himself that that child had surely had a martyr's spirit and a heroine's courage in her; yet had she succumbed to the first hour of pressure, the first whisper of ambition, like the weakest and vainest creature ever born of woman. He had never understood, despite all his knowledge of Lady Dorothy, the sudden and unresisted sacrifice of her daughter. Her words now startled and bewildered him; and showed him a deeper deep than any of which he had dreamed.

More versed in the world's suspicions than she, he saw the keen glittering eyes of the Duchess Jeanne studying them from the bal-

cony, as she laughed and chattered with her chamberlains and soldiers. He released the threads of the lace, and replaced the pillow, and bowed very low.

'You do me too much honour, Princess,' he murmured, too gently for them to reach the keen ears of the brilliant spy of the balcony. 'To accept my allegory was condescension; to interpret it was sympathy; to forgive it is mercy. For all three I thank you. Allow me ——'

He bowed over her hand, which he scarcely touched, bowed again to Madame de Sonnaz, and then left the chamber.

Vere took up her lace-work, and began afresh to entangle the threads.

Her heart was heavy.

She thought that he condemned her; he seemed to her cold and changed.

'How that stupid lace absorbs you, Vera!' cried Jeanne de Sonnaz. 'The Empress has sent to us to ride with her at four, and there is a little *sauterie* in the evening up there. You cannot refuse.'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next morning Corrèze, breakfasting at noon in the bay window of the bright Speisesaal that looks on the three-cornered Platz, and the trees on the esplanade, said to himself, 'I ought to go away.'

But he did not resolve to go.

The night before he also had been summoned to the Schloss. He was famous for his captiousness to sovereigns, but he had been to this summons obedient, and had been welcomed by all, from their majesties to the big dog; and had taken his guitar, and sung, as he sang to please himself, and had been in his most brilliant and his most bewitching mood. In truth

their majesties, charming and gracious and sympathetic though they were, had been of little account to him; what he had thought about, what he had sung to, was a tall slender form clothed in white, with waterlilies about her waist and throat, as though she were Undine. He approached her little; he looked at her always. The knowledge that she was there gave him inspiration; when he sang he surpassed himself; when he went away and strolled on foot down through the pine glades into the little town, he sang half aloud still; and an old forester, going to his work in the grey dawn told his wife that he had heard a *Nix*, with a voice like a nightingale, down in the heart of the woods.

He remained always a mountaineer at heart. The grey stillness and mist of the daybreak, the familiar smell of the pine-boughs, the innocent forest creatures that ran or flew before his feet, the gleam of snow on the peaks in the distance, the very moss at his feet bright with dew, all were delightful to him, and brought his boyhood back to him.

Yet his heart was heavy because he had seen the woman he could have loved; indeed, could no longer deny to himself that he did love her, and yet knew very well that she was as utterly lost to him as though she had been a wraith of the mountain snow that would vanish at touch of the sunrise.

All things were well with him, and fortune spoiled him, as he had said.

As he sat at breakfast in the wide sunny window, and opened his 'Figaro,' he read of the affection of Paris for him, the regret of a world which has, like a beautiful woman, so many to teach it forgetfulness, that any remembrance in absence is unusual homage. A courtier brought him from the court a silver casket of old niello work inlaid with precious stones, and having a miniature by Penicaudius in the lid, and, what he cared for more, a bidding from the Kaiser to hunt chamois amongst the ice-peaks of the Dachstein at daybreak on the morrow. The post arriving brought him little scented letters which told him, in language more or less welcome, that the universal regret

of the many was shared in deeper and tenderer sentiment by the few; and some of these could not fail to charm his vanity, if they failed to touch his heart. Yet he had not much vanity, and he was used to all these favours of peoples, of sovereigns, of beauties. They rained on him as rose-leaves rain on grass in midsummer; and it was the height of summer with him, and none of his rose-leaves were faded. Still——

'I ought to go,' he thought, and that thought absorbed him. He discerned the influence his presence had on Vere. He knew too well his power on women to mistake its exercise. He saw what she had not seen herself; he had long endeavoured to avoid her; he had long feared for them both, the moment when the accidents of society should bring them in contact. No vanity and no selfishness moved him; but an infinite compassion stirred in him, and an infinite sorrow.

'If I let myself love her, my life will be ruined. She will never be as others have been. There will be nothing between us ever except an immense regret.' So he thought as he sat

looking out on the sunshine that played on the silver and gold of the emperor's casket.

At that moment they brought him from Madame de Sonnaz a note bidding him dine with her that night. Corrèze penned in reply a graceful excuse, pleading that he was to set out for the Dachstein at nightfall. 'Who shall say that we need Nihilism,' he wrote in conclusion, 'when a public singer scales ice-peaks with a Kaiser?'

His answer despatched, he lit another cigar, and watched the Traun water gleam under the old grey arches of the bridge.

'So she thinks I shall help her to her vengeance on Sergius Zouroff,' he thought. '*Vous êtes mal tombée, duchesse!*'

August noontide is cool enough in the duchy of Salzburg; he did not feel in the mood for the chatter of the casino and the humours of the Trinkhalle; for the pretty women in their swinging chairs and whist and *écarté* in the river balconies; there were half a hundred people here who in another half hour would seize on him beyond escape, as they trooped

back from their morning exercise and baths. He bethought himself of an offer of horses made him by a Grand Duke staying there, sent a line to the Duke's equerry, and, before his acquaintances had returned from the Trink-halle, was riding slowly out on a handsome Hungarian mare, taking his road by chance, as he paced out of the little town, following the ways of the Traun as it flowed along towards Styria, with the wood-clothed hills rising to right and left.

There is a noble road that runs through the Weissbach Thal to the lake of Attersee. It is sixteen miles or more of forest-roadway. The woods are grand, the trees are giants, moss-grown with age, and set in a wilderness of ferns and flowers; the Weisbach rushes through them white with perpetual foam; the great hills are half light, half gloom beyond the branches, and there is the grey of glaciers, the aerial blue of crevasses, for ever shining behind the forest foliage, where the clouds lie on the mountains, where summer lightnings flash and summer rains drift like mist. The place is full of birds,

and all wild woodland creatures; there is scarcely a habitation from one end of the road to the other. Where any wood has been cleared, there are tracks of lilac heather, and of broom; here and there is a cross telling of some sudden death from flood, or frost, or woodman's misadventure; under the broad drooping branches of the Siberian pines, countless little streams rise and bubble through the grasses; and at the end of it all there is the blue bright lake, blue as a mouse-ear, bright as a child's eyes; the largest lake in all Austria; the Attersee.

War-worn Europe has little left that is more beautiful than that grand tranquil solitary forest-ride, with that azure water for its goal and crown.

The Attersee is very lovely, blue as the Mediterranean; radiantly, wonderfully blue; sweeping away into the distance to the Schaffberg range, with white-sailed boats upon it, and here and there, alas! the trail of a steamer as the vessels go to and from Unterach and Steinbach and Nussdorff.

At Weissbach the meadows go close down to the water, meadows of that rich long flower-filled grass that is the glory of Austria and grows all about the little white stone quays; the boats come up to the edge of the meadows, and the rowers, or those who sail in them, land in that knee-deep grass, under the shade of beech trees. There is a little summer inn on the shore, with balconies and hanging creepers; it is modest and does not greatly hurt the scene; the hills rise sheer and bold above it. A little higher yet are the mountains of the Hochlaken and Hoellen ranges, where you can shoot, if you will, the golden eagle and the vulture.

Corrèze, beguiled by the beauty of the road, followed it leisurely, till it led him to the Attersee in some two hours' time. There he dismounted and strolled about. It was not very often that he had leisure for long quiet hours in the open air, but he always enjoyed them; he felt angry with himself that in this pure atmosphere, in this serene loveliness, he

remained dissatisfied and ill at ease—because he was alone.

Do what he would he could not forget the grand troubled eyes of Vere, and the accent of her voice when she had said, 'It was not my fault that I sank!'

'Nothing could ever be her fault,' he thought, 'yet what could they do to her so quickly? what force could her mother use?'

He left the mare in the inn-stable for rest, and wandered up into the higher slopes of the hills, leaving the lake with its boats that came and went, its meadows, dotted with human butterflies, its little landing-place with flags flying. 'The forest-road is grander,' he said, and told his groom to lead the horse back after him when it was rested; he meant to return to Ischl on foot. Fifteen miles of woodland on a summer afternoon is more charming out of saddle than in it.

'With a horse one must go so terribly straight,' he thought to himself; 'it is the by-paths that are the charm of the forest; the turning to left or to right at one's whim; the

resting by the way, the losing oneself even, and the chance of passing the night under the stars; the pleasure of being young again at our old *école buissonière.* All that is inevitably lost when one rides.'

So he turned his back on the blue Attersee, and walked home along the dale, that seemed a path of green and gold as the sunbeams of afternoon shone through the trees.

There is a part that is mere moorland, where the pines have been felled and the heather grows alone; the sandy road track runs between the lilac plumes, lying open to the light for a little while before it plunges again into the deep sweet shadows of the forest growth. On the crest of that more open part he saw two human figures and a dog; they were dark and colourless against the bright afternoon light, yet, in an instant, he recognised them—they were the figures of Vere and of a Russian servant.

In a few moments he could overtake them, for they moved slowly. He hesitated—doubted—said to himself that he would do best to turn back again whilst he was still unseen. At that

moment Vere paused, looked behind her to see the sun going towards its setting above the mountains, and saw also himself.

He hesitated no more, but approached her.

He saw that delicate colour, that was like the hue of the wild rose he had once given her, come into her face; but she gave him her hand simply and cordially, and he bowed over it with his head uncovered.

'You have been to the lake, Princess? So have I; but the forest is better. The Attersee has too many people by it, and I saw a funnel in the distance—all illusion was destroyed.'

'The steamers make the tour of it, unhappily. But this forest road is perfect. I send my ponies on to wait for me by the Chorynskyclause—and you?'

'I have left my horse, or rather Duke Ludwig's horse, to follow me. She is a young mare, and needs one's attention, which spoils the pleasures of the wood. What a grand country it is! If it did not rain so often it would be Arcadia. Are you strong enough to walk so far, madame?'

The 'madame' hurt him to say, and hurt her to hear. She answered, a little hurriedly, that she liked walking—it never hurt her—in Paris she could walk so little, that tired her far more. And Corrèze, unasked but unrepulsed, strolled on beside her; the grim white-bearded servant behind them.

She was dressed with perfect simplicity in something cream-hued and soft, but he thought that she looked lovelier than she had done even in her jewels and her nénuphars at night.

'*O gioventù, primavera della vita!*' he thought. 'Even a tyrant like the Muscovite cannot altogether spoil its glories.'

They had come now into the fragrant gloom of the forest, where the trees stood thick as bowmen in a fight in olden days, and the mountains rose behind them stern and blue like tempest-clouds, while the silence was full of the fresh sound of rushing waters.

Loris was darting hither and thither, chasing hares, scenting foxes, starting birds of all species, but never going very far afield from his mistress.

They walked on almost in silence—the woodland had that beauty amidst which idle speech seems a sort of profanation—and Corrèze was musing:

'Shall I tell her the truth, and frighten her and disgust her, and never see her face again, except across the gas-glare of the Grand Opéra? Or shall I keep silence, and try and deserve her trust, and try and be some shield between her and the world they have cast her into; and become in time, perhaps, of some aid and service to her? One way is selfish and easy; the other——'

He knew himself, and knew women, too well to be blind to any of the dangers that would befall both in the latter course; but an infinite compassion was in him for this young and beautiful woman; a deep tenderness was in him for her—mournful and wistful—quelling passion. He for ever reproached himself that he had not followed his impulse, and cast prudence to the winds, and stayed by the gray northern sea and saved her, whilst yet there had been time, from the world and from her mother.

They paced onward side by side.

The old man-servant followed with a frown on his brows. He knew Corrèze by sight, he had seen all Petersburg wild with adoration of their idol, running before his sledge, and strewing flowers and evergreens on the frozen earth in his honour; but he did not think it fitting for a mere foreign singer to walk side by side with the Princess Zouroff. Nevertheless, he kept respectfully his due distance behind them, marvelling only whether it would lie within his duty to tell his master of this strange summer day's stroll.

'Madame de Sonnaz is not with you to-day?' Corrèze was saying as he roused himself from his meditation.

Vere answered him: 'No. She has many other friends in Ischl; she is with the Archduchess Sophie.'

'Ah! You like Madame de Sonnaz? Of course you do, since you travel together.'

'She offered to come with me. M. Zouroff accepted for me. It was very kind of her.'

'Bah! And that is the way they trick you,

and you never dream of their shame!' thought Corrèze, as he merely said aloud, 'The duchesse is very witty, very charming; she must be an amusing companion—when she is in a good humour!'

'You do not like her? You seemed as if you did yesterday.'

It was a little reproach that unconsciously escaped her. His gallantries and his *persiflage* at the breakfast had hurt her too much for her to so soon forget them.

'I like her as I like all her world,' said Corrèze. 'I like her with my intelligence infinitely; with my heart, or what does duty for it, I abhor her.'

'You separate intelligence and feeling then?'

'By five thousand leagues! Will M. Zouroff join you here?'

'He will meet us at Vienna; Madame de Sonnaz is going to stay with me at Svir.'

'You will be long in Russia?'

'Oh, no; the two next months, perhaps.'

'But so much long travel; does it not tire you, since you are not strong?'

'I think I am strong enough. It is not that; I am tired—but it is of being useless.'

She would have said joyless and friendless too, but she knew that it was not well for any lamentation to escape her which could seem to cast blame upon her husband, or ask pity for herself.

'I am as useless as the lace I make,' she said more lightly, to take weight off her words. 'There is so much routine in the life we lead; I cannot escape from it. The days are all swallowed up by small things. When I was a child, and read of the old etiquette of Versailles, of the *grand couvert* and the *petit couvert*, and the *très petit couvert*, and all the rest of the formal divisions of the hours, I used to think how terrible it must have been to be the king; but our lives are much the same, they are divided between *petits couverts* and *grands couverts*, and there is no other time left.'

'Yes, our great world is much like their great world—only with the dignity left out!' said Corrèze, as he thought:

> No head but some world genius should rest
> Above the treasures of that perfect breast.
> . . . . . Yet thou art bound—
> O waste of nature!—to a shameless hound;
> To shameless lust! . . . Athene to a Satyr.

'And how did they make her take the Satyr?' he mused. 'She is not a reed to be blown by any wind, nor yet a clay to be moulded by any hand. What force did Miladi Dolly use?'

'It is very difficult to be of much use,' Vere said once more as she walked on; 'they say one does more harm than good by charity, and what else is there?'

'Your own peasantry? In those Russian villages there must be so much ignorance, so much superstition, so little comprehension of the value of freedom or morality ——'

'My husband does not like me to interfere with the peasantry; and, beside, I am so rarely in that country. The little I can do, I do in Paris. Ah!' She interrupted herself with a sudden remembrance, and a smile beamed over her face, as she turned it to Corrèze. 'I know Père Martin and his daughter; how they love

you! They told me everything. What simple good creatures they are!'

Corrèze smiled too.

'They are like the public—they over-estimate me sadly, and their enthusiasm dowers me with excellencies that I never possessed. How came you to find that father and daughter out, Princess? I thought they lived like dormice.'

She told him the little tale; and it drew them together, and made them more at ease one with another by its community of interest, as they moved slowly down the woodland road through the leafy dusky shadows. For in the heart of each there was a dread that made them nervous. She thought always: 'If only he will spare me my husband's name.' And he thought: 'If only she would never speak to me of her husband!'

Memories were between them that held them together, as the thought of little dead children will sometimes hold those who have loved and parted for ever.

He longed to know what force, or what temptation, had brought her to this base and

joyless marriage; but his lips were shut. He had saved her from the insult of Noisette, but he thought she did not know it; he went yearly to hear the lark sing on the head of the cliff where he had gathered her rose, but he thought she knew nothing of that either. Yet the sense of these things was between them; and he dared not look at her as he went on down the mountain road.

She was thinking always of his bidding to her, when she had been a child, to keep unspotted from the world. She longed to tell him that she had not stooped to the guilt of base vanities when she had given herself to Sergius Zouroff, but her lips were shut.

'I must not blame my mother, nor my husband,' she thought. Her cheeks burned as she felt, since he had saved her from the outrage of the Kermesse, that he must know the daily insults of her life. She was troubled, confused, oppressed; yet the charm of his presence held her like an incantation. She went slowly through the grand old wood, as Spenser's heroines through enchanted forests.

'You said that you like Madame de Sonnaz?' he asked again abruptly.

'She is very agreeable,' she said, hesitatingly; 'and she is very good-natured to me; she reminds me of many things that I displease Prince Zouroff in; mere trifles of ceremonies and observances that I forget, for I am very forgetful, you know.'

'Of little things, perhaps; thoughtful people often are. Big brains do not easily hold trifles. So Madame de Sonnaz plays the part of Mentor to you about these little packets of starch that the *beau monde* thinks are the staff of life? That is kind of her, for I think no one ever more completely managed to throw the starch over their left shoulder than she has done!'

'You do not like her?'

'Oh! one always likes great ladies and pretty women. Not that she is pretty, but she has *du charme*, which is perhaps more. All I intended to say was, that she is not invariably sincere, and it might be as well that you should remember that, if she be intimate enough with you to give you counsels ——'

'My husband told me to always listen to, and follow what she said. He has, I believe, a great esteem for her.'

Corrèze swore an oath, that only a foxglove heard, as he stooped to gather it. There was a great disgust on his mobile face, that she did not see, as he was bending down amongst the blossoms.

'No doubt,' he said briefly; 'esteem is not exactly what the Duchesse Jeanne has inspired or sought to inspire; but M. Zouroff possibly knows her better than I can do ——'

'But is she not a good woman?' Vere asked, with a little sternness coming on her delicate face.

Corrèze laughed a little; yet there was a great compassion in his eyes as he glanced at her.

'Good? Madame Jeanne? I am afraid she would laugh very much if she heard you. Yes; she is very good for five minutes after she has left the confessional—for she does go to confess, though I cannot imagine her telling truth there. It would be *trop bourgeoise.*'

'You speak as if she were indeed not good!'

'Good? bad? If there were only good and bad in this world it would not matter so much,' said Corrèze a little recklessly and at random. 'Life would not be such a disheartening affair as it is. Unfortunately the majority of people are neither one nor the other, and have little inclination for either crime or virtue. It would be almost as absurd to condemn them as to admire them. They are like tracks of shifting sand, in which nothing good or bad can take root. To me they are more despairing to contemplate than the darkest depth of evil; out of that may come such hope as comes of redemption and remorse, but in the vast, frivolous, featureless, mass of society there is no hope. It is like a feather bed, in which the finest steel must lose point and power!——'

'But is the Duchesse de Sonnaz characterless? Frivolous, perhaps, but surely not characterless?' said Vere, with that adherence to the simple point of argument and rejection of all

discursiveness which had once made her the despair of her mother.

'See for yourself, Princess,' said Corrèze suggestively. 'What she has, or has not, of character may well become your study. When we are intimate with any person it is very needful to know them well; what one's mere acquaintances are matters little, one can no more count them than count the gnats on a summer day; but about our friends we cannot be too careful.'

'She is not my friend; I have not any friend.'

There was a loneliness and a melancholy in the simplicity of the words that was in pathetic contrast with that position which so many other women envied her.

Tender words, that once said could never have been withdrawn, and would have divided him from her for ever, rose to the lips of Corrèze, but he did not utter them; he answered her with equally simple seriousness:

'I can believe that you have not. You would find them perhaps in a world you are

not allowed to know anything of; a world of narrow means but of wide thoughts and high ideals. In our world—I may say ours, for if you are one of its great ladies I am one of its pets and playthings, and so may claim a place in it—there is very little thought, and there is certainly no kind of ideal beyond winning the Grand Prix for one sex, and being better dressed than everybody, for the other. It is scarcely possible that you should find much sympathy in it; and, without sympathy there is no friendship. There are noble people in it still here and there, it is true, but the pity of modern life in society is that all its habits, its excitements, and its high pressure, make as effectual a disguise morally as our domino in Carnival ball does physically. Everybody looks just like everybody else. Perhaps, as under the domino, so under the appearance, there may be great nobility as great deformity; but all look alike. Were Socrates amongst us he would only look like a club-bore, and were there Messalina she would only look—well—look much like our Duchesse Jeanne.'

Vere glanced up at him quickly, then reddened slightly, and rose from the bench.

'What a baseness I am committing to speak ill of a woman who gave me her smiles and her strawberries,' thought Corrèze. 'Nevertheless, warned against Madame Jeanne she must be, even if she think me ever so treacherous to give the warning. She knows nothing; it would be as well she should know nothing; only, if she be not on her guard, Jeanne will hurt her—some way. The mistress of Zouroff will never forgive his wife, and Casse-une-Croûte would pardon her more readily than would the wife of Duc Paul. Oh God! what a world to throw her into! The white doe of Rylstone cast into a vivisector's torture trough!'

And what could he say to her of it all? Nothing.

Midway in this dale of Weissbach there is a memorial cross, with a rude painting; the trees are majestic and gigantic there; there is a wooden bench; and a little way down, under the trees, there is the river broken up by rocks and stones into eddies and freshets of white foam.

'Rest here, Princess,' said Corrèze. 'You have walked several miles by this, and that stick parasol of yours is no alpenstock to help you much. Look at those hills through the trees; one sees here, if nowhere else, what the poets' "blue air" means. Soon the sun will set, and the sapphire blue will be cold grey. But rest a few moments, and I will gather you some of that yellow gentian. You keep your old love of flowers, I am sure?'

Vere smiled a little sadly.

'Indeed, yes; but it is with flowers as with everything else, I think, in the world; one cannot enjoy them for the profusion and the waste of them everywhere. When one thinks of the millions that die at one ball!—and no one hardly looks at them. The most you hear anyone say is, "the rooms look very well to-night." And the flowers die for that.'

'That comes of the pretentious prodigality we call civilisation,' said Corrèze. 'More prosaically it is just the same with food; at every grand dinner enough food is wasted to feed a whole street, and the number of dishes

is so exaggerated that half of them go away untasted, and even the other half is too much for any mortal appetite. I do not know why we do it; no one enjoys it; Lazarus out of the alleys might, perhaps, by way of change, but then he is never invited.'

'Everything in our life is so exaggerated,' said Vere, with a sigh of fatigue, as she recalled the endless weariness of the state banquets, the court balls, the perpetual succession of entertainments, which in her world represented pleasure. 'There is nothing but exaggeration everywhere; to me it always seems vulgarity. Our dress is overloaded like our dinners; our days are over-filled like our houses. Who is to blame? The leaders of society, I suppose.'

'Leaders like Madame Jeanne,' said Corrèze quickly.

She smiled a little.

'You are very angry with her!'

'Princess—frankly, I do not think she is a fit companion for you.'

'My husband thinks that she is so.'

'Then there is no more to be said, no

doubt,' said Corrèze with his teeth shut. 'For me to correct the judgment of M. Zouroff would be too great presumption.'

'You may be quite right,' said Vere. 'But you see it is not for me to question; I have only to obey.'

Corrèze choked an oath into silence, and wandered a little way towards the water to gather another foxglove.

Vere sat on the low bench under the crucifix on the great tree; she had taken off her hat; she had the flowers in her lap; her dress was white; she had no ornament of any sort; she looked very like the child who had sat with him by the sweet-briar hedge on Calvados. Taller, lovelier, with a different expression on her grave, proud, face, and all the questioning eagerness gone for ever from her eyes; yet, for the moment, very like—so like, that, but for the gleam of the diamond circlet that was her marriage ring, he would have forgotten.

He came and leaned against one of the great trees, and watched the shadows of the

leaves flutter on her white skirts. He realised that he loved her more than he had ever loved anything on earth—and she was the wife of Sergius Zouroff. She was no more Vere, but the Princess Vera, and her world thought her so cold that it had called her the edelweiss.

He forced himself to speak of idle things.

'After all,' he said aloud, 'when all is said and done, I do believe the artistic life to be the happiest the earth holds. To be sure, there is a general feeling still that we do not deserve Christian burial, but that need not much trouble a living man. I think, despite all the shadows that envy and obtuseness, and the malevolence of the unsuccessful rival, and the absurdities of the incapable critic, cast upon its path, the artistic life is the finest, the truest, the most Greek, and so the really happiest. Artists see, and hear, and feel more than other people; when they are artists really, and not mere manufacturers, as too many are or become. My own art has a little too much smell of the footlights; I have too few hours alone with Beethoven and Mozart, and too many with the

gaslit crowds before me. Yet it has many beautiful things in it; it is always picturesque, never mediocre. Think of my life beside a banker's in his parlour, beside a lawyer's in the courts, they are like spiders, shut up in their own dust. I am like a swallow, who always sees the sun because he goes where it is summer.'

'It is always summer with you.' There was a tinge of regret and of wistfulness in her voice of which she was not conscious.

'It will be winter henceforward,' he thought as he answered: 'Yes; it has been so. I have been singularly fortunate—perhaps as much in the temperament I was born with as in other things; for, if we escape any very great calamity, it is our own nature that makes it summer or makes it winter with us.'

'But if you were in Siberia,' said Vere with a faint smile; 'could you make it summer there?'

'I would try,' said Corrèze. 'I suppose Nature would look grand there sometimes, and there would be one's fellow-creatures. But then, you know, it has been my good fortune

always to be in the sun; I am no judge of darkness. I dread it. Sometimes I wake in the night and think if I lost my voice all suddenly, as I may any day, how should I bear it?—to be living and only a memory to the public, as if I were dead—scarcely a memory even; there is no written record of song, and its mere echo soon goes off the ear. How should I bear it—to be dumb? to be dethroned? I am afraid I should bear it ill. After all, one may be a coward without knowing it.'

'Do not speak of it!' said Vere quickly, with a sense of pain. Mute! That voice which she thought had all the melody that poets dream of when they write of angels! It hurt her even to imagine it.

'It could not be worse than Siberia, and men live through that,' said Corrèze. 'Have you not seen, Princess, at a great ball, some one disappear quickly and quietly, and heard a whisper run through the dancers of "Tomsk," and caught a look on some few faces that told you a tarantass was going out into the darkness, over the snow, full gallop, with a political

prisoner between his guards? Ah! it is horrible! When one has seen it it makes one feel cold, even at noon in midsummer, to remember it.'

'Russia is always terrible,' said Vere, with a little shudder. 'No where on earth are there such ghastly contrasts; you live in a hothouse with your palms, and the poor are all round you in the ice; everything is like that.'

'And yet you are Russian;' said Corrèze a little cruelly and bitterly; for he had never forgiven her quick descent into her mother's toils, her quick acceptance of temptation. 'You are certainly Russian. You are no longer Vere even; you are Princess Vera.'

'I am always Vere,' she said in a low tone. 'They must call me what they will, but it alters nothing.'

'And Vera is a good name, too,' said Corrèze, bending his eyes almost sternly on hers. 'It means Faith.'

'Yes; it means that.'

He glided into the grass at the foot of the tree, and sat there, leaning on his elbow, and

looking towards her; it was the attitude in which she had seen him first upon the beach at Trouville.

He was always graceful in all he did; the soft afternoon light was upon his face; he had thrown his broad felt hat on the grass; a stray sunbeam wandered in the bright brown of his hair.

Vere glanced at him, and was about to speak; then hesitated—paused—at last unclosed her lips so long shut in silence.

'You remember that you bade me keep myself unspotted from the world?' she said suddenly. 'I want to tell you, that I strive always to do so—yes, I do. I was never ruled by ambition and vanity—as you think. I cannot tell you more; but, if you understand me at all, you will understand that that is true.'

'I knew it without your telling me.'

He ceased to remember that ever he had suspected her, or ever reproached her. It was a mystery to him that this proud, strong, pure nature should have ever been brought low by

any force; but he accepted the fact of it as men in their faith accept miracles.

'She was such a child; who can tell what they did or said?' he mused, as an infinite tenderness and compassion came over him. This woman was not twenty yet, and she had tasted all the deepest bitterness of life, and all its outrages of passion and of vice!

She was to him like one of the young saints of old, on whom tyrants and torturers spent all the filth and fury of their will, yet could not touch the soul or break the courage of the thing that they dishonoured.

Women had not taught him reverence. He had found them frail when he had not found them base; but, as great a reverence as ever moved Gawaine or Sintram, moved him towards Vere now. He feared to speak lest he should offend her; it was hard to give her sympathy even to give her comprehension, without seeming to offer her insult. He knew that she was too loyal to the man whose name she bore to bear to hear him blamed, with whatsoever justice it might be.

He was silent, while leaning on his arm, and looking down upon the cups and sceptres of the green moss on which he rested. If he looked up at her face he feared his strength of self-control would fail him, and his lips be loosened.

Vere bound together his wild flowers one by one. She longed for him to believe her guiltless of the low ambitions of the world; she could not bear that he should fancy the low temptations of the world's wealth and rank had ever had power over her.

Yet she was the wife of Sergius Zouroff. What could she hope to make him think in face of that one fact?

Suddenly he looked up at her; his brilliant eyes were dim with tears, yet flashed darkly with a sombre indignation.

'I understand,' he said at last, his old habit of quick and eloquent speech returning to him. 'I think I have always understood without words; I think all the world does. And that is why one half of it at least has no forgiveness for you—Princess.'

He added the title with a little effort; it was as a curb on his memory, on his impulse; he set it as a barrier between him and her.

'It is I who do not understand,' said Vere, with a faint smile, and an accent of interrogation. She did not look away from the wood flowers. His eyes fed themselves on the lines of her delicate and noble features; he breathed quickly; the colour came into his face.

'No; you do not understand,' he said rapidly. 'There is your danger. There is your weakness. Do you know what it costs to be an innocent woman in the world you live in? —the great world as it calls itself, God help us! To be chaste in mind and body, thought and deed, to be innocent in soul and substance, not merely with sufficient abstinence from evil not to endanger position, not merely with physical coldness that can deny the passions it is diverted to influence, but real chastity, real innocence, which recoils from the shadow of sin, and shrinks from the laughter of lust. Do you know what the cost of such are? I will tell you. Their cost is isolation—the sneer

they are branded with is 'out of fashion'—no one will say it, perhaps, but all will make you feel it. If you be ashamed to go half clothed; if you be unwilling to laugh at innuendoes; if you be unable to understand an indecency in a song, or a gag at a theatre; if you do not find a charm in suggested filth; if you do not care to have loose women for your friends, however high may be their rank; if adultery look to you all the worse because it is a domestic pet and plaything; and if immorality seem to you but the more shameful because it is romped with at the children's hour, danced with at the Queen's ball, made a guest at the house-parties, and smuggled smilingly through the custom-officers of society—if you be so behind your time as this, you insult your generation; you are a reproach to it, and an *ennui*. The union of society is a Camorra or Mafia. Those who are not of it must at least subscribe to it, and smile on it, or they are lost. There is your danger, my Princess of Faith. How can they forgive you, any one of them, the women who have not your loveliness and your mind, and to

whom you are a perpetual, an unconscious, an inexorable rebuke? Clothed with innocence is metaphor and fact with you, and do you understand the women of your world so little yet as not to understand that they would pardon you the nakedness of vice much sooner than they ever will those stainless robes which you share with the children and the angels?'

He ceased; eloquence when he was moved was habitual as song had been to him in his childhood when he had gathered his sheep and goats on the green alp. He paused abruptly, because, had he spoken more, he would have uttered words that could never have been recalled, words that would have been set for ever between them like a gulf of flame.

Vere had listened; her face had flushed a little, then had grown paler than was even usual to her. She understood now well enough —too well; an intense sweetness and a vague shame came to her with his words; the one that he should read her soul so clearly, the other that he should know her path so dark, her fate so hateful.

She gathered the wood-flowers together and rose.

'I am far from the angels and you think too well of me,' she said, with a tremor in her voice. 'I think the sun is setting; it grows late.'

Corrèze rose, with a sigh, to his feet, and raised her hat from the ground.

'Yes. It will soon be dark; very dark to me. Princess, will you think of what I said? will you be on your guard with your foes?'

'Who are they?'

'All women, most men. In a word, a world that is not fit for your footsteps.'

Vere was silent, thinking.

'I have more courage than insight,' she said, with a little smile, at last; 'and it is easier to me to endure than to influence. I think I influence no one. It must be my fault. They say I am wanting in sympathy.'

'Nay, the notes around you are too coarse to strike an echo from you—that is all. You have a perfect sympathy with all that is noble, but they never give you that.'

'Let us move quickly, the sun is set,' she said, as she took her hat from him, and walked on down the forest road.

Neither spoke. In a little time they had reached the sluices, where the imprisoned timbers lay awaiting the weekly rush of the waters. There a little low carriage with some mountain ponies, lent her by the Court, was awaiting her.

Keeping his wild blossoms of the forest in one hand, she gave him the other.

'I shall see you to-morrow?' she asked, with the frank simplicity and directness of her nature.

He hesitated a moment, then answered: 'To-night I go up into the Thorstein ice-fields; we may be away some days; but when I come down from the mountains, yes; certainly yes, madame, I will have the honour of saluting you once more. And I will bring you some edelweiss. It is the flower they call you after in Paris.'

'Do they? I did not know it. Adieu.'

Her little postilion, a boy from the Imperial

stables, with a silver horn and a ribboned and tasselled dress, cracked his whip, and the ponies went away at a trot down towards the valley, whilst beyond, the last brightness of daylight was shining above the grey-white sheet of the Carl Eisfeld that rose in view.

Corrèze stood on the edge of the wilderness of timber, lying in disorder in the dry bed of the river, awaiting the loosening of the White Brook floods to float them to the Traun. Some birds began singing in the wood; as the sun set behind the glacier.

'They are singing in my heart too,' thought Corrèze, 'but I must not listen to them. Heine knew the caprice and the tragedy of fate. He wrought no miracle to make the pine and the palm-tree meet.'

The days that followed dragged slowly over the head of Vere.

Ischl, in its nook between the hills, has always a certain sadness about it, and to her it seemed grown grey and very dull. The glaciers of Dachstein and Thorstein gleamed whitely affar off, and her thoughts were with

the hunters underneath those butresses of ice in the haunts of the steinbock and the vulture.

The perpetual clatter of the duchesse's voluble tongue, and the chatter of society that was always about her—even here, in the heart of the Salzkammergut—wearied her and irritated her more than usual. She felt a painful longing for that soft deep voice of Corrèze, which to her never spoke a commonplace or a compliment, for the quick instinctive sympathy which he gave her without alarming her loyalty or wounding her pride.

'You are very dull, Vera,' said the duchesse impatiently, at length.

'I am never very gay,' said Vere coldly. 'You knew that when you offered to accompany me.'

'Your husband wished us to be together, said Madame Jeanne, a little angrily.

'You are very kind—to my husband—to so study his wishes,' said Vere, with a certain challenge in her glance. But the duchesse did not take up the challenge.

'Corrèze has told her something,' she thought.

To quarrel with Vere was the last thing she wished to do. She laughed carelessly, said something pleasant, and affected to be charmed with Ischl.

They went to the Imperial villa, rode a great deal, were courted by the notabilities as befitted one of the loveliest and one of the wittiest women of the time; and the five days slipped away, as the Traun water slid under its bridges and over its falls.

Vere began to listen wistfully for tidings of the return of the Kaiser's hunting party. One morning at breakfast she heard that the emperor had come back at daybreak. But of Corrèze there was nothing said.

Had it been any other memory than that of Corrèze she would have been disgusted and angered with herself at his occupation of her thoughts; but he so long had been to her an ideal, an abstraction, an embodiment of all high and heroic things, a living poem, that his absorption of her mind and memory had no

alarm for her. He was still an ideal figure; now, when he was lost in the mists of the ice-fields of the Dachstein, as in winter when before her in the creations of Beethoven, of Mozart, and of Meyerbeer.

A little later that morning a jäger brought to the Kaiserinn hotel a grand golden eagle, shot so that it had died instantaneously, and been picked up upon the snow in all its beauty of plumage, without a feather ruffled. He brought also a large cluster of edelweiss from the summit of Thorstein, and a letter. The letter was to Madame de Sonnaz from Corrèze.

She was sitting opposite to Vere on the balcony that fronted the bridge.

'From Der Freischutz!' she said with a laugh. 'He has not shot his own arm off, like Roger, that is evident.'

Vere did not raise her head from her lace-work.

It had been written in the highest hut under the Dachsteinspitze, and was in pencil. After graceful opening compliments, in which no one knew better than himself how to make

the commonplace triviality of formula seem spontaneous and fresh, he said:

'I have shot a nobler creature than myself —men generally do when they shoot at all. Emblematic of the Napoléonic cause to which Madame la Duchesse has dedicated herself— inasmuch as it has lived on carrion, and though golden, it will be rotten in a day, or at best stuffed with straw—I desire to lay it at the feet of Madame Jeanne, where its murderer has ever longed, but never dared, to prostrate himself. I offer the edelweiss to Madame la Princesse Zouroff, as it is well known to be her emblem. It has no other value than that of representing her by living at an altitude where nothing but the snow and the star-rays presume to share its solitude.'

He said, in conclusion, that his hunting trip having taken up the five days which he had allotted himself for Ischl, he feared he should see neither of them again until they met in Paris in winter, as his engagements took him at once to the Hague, thence to Dresden, where

there were special performances in honour of one of the gods of his old faith—Glück.

'Very pretty,' reflected the Duchesse Jeanne as she read. 'I suppose he reached the edelweiss himself, or he could scarcely have gathered it. I suppose Vera will understand that part of the "emblem."'

But though she thought so she did not say so; she was a courageous woman, but not quite courageous enough for that. She gave the edelweiss and the note together to her companion, and only said, with a little smile, 'Corrèze always writes such pretty notes. It is an accomplishment that has its dangers. There is scarcely a good-looking woman in Paris who has not a bundle, more or less big, of his letters; all with that tell-tale suggestive device of his—that silver Love, with one wing caught in a thorn-bush of roses; he drew it himself. You saw it on his flag at the Kermesse. Oh, of course it is not on this paper. He scribbled this in some châlet of the Dachstein. I will have my eagle stuffed, and it shall have real rubies for eyes; and I will

put it in my dining-room in Paris, and Corrèze for his sins shall sit underneath it and pledge the Violet and the Bee. Not that he ever will though; if he have any political faith at all he is a Legitimist—if he be not a Communist. But I don't think he thinks about those things. He told me once that nightingales do not build either in new stucco or in old timber—that they only wanted a bush of rose-laurel. He is a *mortel fantasque*, you know, and people have spoiled him. He is very vain, and he thinks himself a Sultan.'

All the while the duchesse was studying narrowly her companion as she spoke.

Vere, without any apparent attention to it, put her edelweiss in an old gold hunting goblet, that she had bought that morning in one of the little dark shops of Ischl; and the duchesse could tell nothing from her face.

In her heart Vere felt a sense of irritation and disappointment. The note seemed to her flippant, the homage of it insincere, and his departure unnecessary and a slight. She did not know that he wanted to turn aside from

her the suspicion of a woman in whom he foresaw a perilous foe for her; and that to disarm worldly perils he used worldly weapons. Vere no more understood that than one of Chaucer's heroines, with straight glaive and simple shield, would have understood the tactics of a game of Kriegspiel.

And why did he go?

She was far from dreaming that he went to avoid her. The song of Heine did not mean to her all that it meant to him. That she had some place in his memory, some hold on his interest, she thought—but nothing more; and even that she almost doubted now; how could he write of her to Jeanne de Sonnaz?

A cold and cruel fear that she had deceived herself in trusting him seized on her; she heard of him always as capricious, as unstable, as vain; who could tell, she thought? Perhaps she had only given him food for vanity and for laughter. Perhaps his seriousness and his sympathy had been but a mere passing mood, an emotion; no more real than those he assumed so perfectly upon his stage.

The doubt hurt her cruelly; and did not stay long with her, for her soul was too noble to harbour distrust. Yet, at her ear Jeanne de Sonnaz perpetually dropped slight words, little stories, shrewd hints, that all made him the centre of adventures as varied and as little noble as those of any hero of amorous comedy. Ever and again a chill sickening doubt touched her—that she, at once the proudest and the humblest woman in the world, had been the amusement of an hour to a brilliant but shallow *persifleur*.

She carried the gold goblet with the edelweiss of the Thorstein into her own chamber, and, when quite alone, she burst into tears.

She never shed tears now. It had seemed to her as if they were scorched up by the arid desolation of her life. They did her good like dew in drought. So much she owed Corrèze.

Corrèze himself at that hour—having taken leave at daybreak of the imperial hunter and his courtly companions, who were returning into Ischl—was walking by his guide's side down the face] of the Dachstein towards the

green Rauris range, meaning to go across thence into the beautiful valley of Ens, and descend next day into the Maindling Pass between the Salzkammergut and Styria. He was still at a great elevation; still amidst snow and ice; and the Rauris lay below him like a green billowy sea. There was some edelweiss in his path, and he stooped and plucked a little piece, and put it in his wallet.

'O iceflower, you are not colder than my heart,' he said to himself. 'But it is best to go; best for her. I will dedicate myself to you, iceflower, and of the roses I will have no more; no, and no more of the "lilies and languor." Edelweiss, you shall live with me and be my amulet. You will wither and shrivel and be nothing, but you will remind me of my vow, and if others will rage, let them. To the iceflower I will be true as far as a man in his weakness can be. Will that denial be love? In the old chivalrous days they read it so. They kept their faith though they never saw their lady's face. The Duchess Jeanne would laugh—and others too.'

And he went down over the rugged stony slope, with the snow deep on either side, and the green ice glistening at his feet, and the woods of the Rauris lifting themselves up from the clouds and the grey air below; and there on Dachstein, where never note of nightingale was heard since the world was made, this nightingale, that ladies loved and that roses entangled in their thorns, sang wearily to himself the song of Heine—the song of the palm-tree and the pine.

CHAPTER XX.

THE days went on, and the duchesse made them gay enough, being one of those persons who cannot live without excitement, and make it germinate wherever they are. Carried in her *chaise-à-porteurs*, playing *chemin de fer* on her balcony, waltzing at the little dances of the imperial court, making excursions in the pine-woods or down the lakes, she surrounded herself with officers and courtiers, and created around her that atmosphere of diversion, revelry, and intrigue, without which a woman of our world can no more live than a mocking-bird without a globe of water. But, all the while,

she never relaxed in a vigilant observation of her companion; and the departure of Corrèze baffled and annoyed her.

She had had a suspicion, and it had gone out in smoke. She had spent much ingenuity in contriving to bring Vere to the Salzkammergut, after having disbursed much in discovering the projects for the summer sojourns of Corrèze; and, with his departure, all her carefully built house of cards fell to pieces. She did not understand it; she was completely bewildered, as he had intended her to be, by the airy indifference of his message to her companion, and his failure to return from the glaciers into the valley. She regretted that she had troubled herself to be buried for a month in this green tomb amongst the hills; but it was impossible to change her imprisonment now. They had begun the routine of the waters, and she had to solace herself as best she might with the imperial courtesies, and with sending little notes to her friends, the sparkle of which was like the brightness of an acid drink, and contrasted strongly with

the few grave constrained lines that were penned by Vere.

One day, when they had but little more time to spend on the Traun banks, she got together a riding and driving party to Old Aussee.

Aussee is quaint, and ancient, and charming, where it stands on its three-branched river; its people are old-fashioned and simple; its encircling mountains and its dark waters are full of peace and solemnity. When the gay world breaks in on these quiet old towns, and deep lakes, and snow-girt hills, there seems a profanity in the invasion. It is only for a very little while. At the first breath of autumn the butterflies flee, and the fishermen and salt-workers, and timber-hewers and chamois-hunters are left alone with their waters and their hills.

The duchesse's driving party was very picturesque, very showy, very noisy—'good society' is always very noisy nowadays, and has forgotten that a loud laugh used to be 'bad form.' They were all people of very high degree, but they all smoked, they all chattered shrilly, and they

all looked very much as if they had been cut out of the *Vie Parisienne*, and put in motion. Old Aussee, with its legends, its homely Styrian townsfolk, and its grand circle of snowclad summits were nothing to them—they liked the Opern-ring, the Bois, or Pall-Mall.

Vere got away from them, and went by herself to visit the Spitalkirche. The altar is pure old German work of the fourteenth century, and she had heard of it from Kaulbach. In these old Austrian towns the churches are always very reverent places; dark and tranquil; overladen indeed with ornament and images, but too full of shadow for these to much offend; there is the scent of centuries of incense; the ivories are yellow with the damp of ages. Mountain suzerains and bold ritters, whose deeds are still sung of in twilight to the zither, sleep beneath the moss-grown pavement; their shields and crowns are worn flat to the stone they were embossed on by the passing feet of generations of worshippers. High above in the darkness there is always some colossal carved or moulded Christ. Through the half-opened

iron-studded door there is always the smell of pinewoods, the gleam of water, the greenness of Alpine grass; often, too, there is the silvery falling of rain, and the fresh smell of it comes through the church, by whose black benches and dim lamps there will be sure to be some old bent woman praying.

The little church was more congenial to Vere than the companionship of her friends, who were boating on the Traun, while their servants unpacked their luncheon and their wines. She managed to elude them, and began to sketch the wings of the altar. She sent her servant to wait outside. The place was dreary and dark; the pure Alpine air blew in from an open pane in a stained window, there was the tinkle of a cow-bell, and the sound of running water from without; a dog came and looked at her.

The altar was not an easy one to copy; the candles were not lighted before it, and the daylight, grey and subdued without, as it is so often here, was very faint within.

'After all, what is the use of my copying

it,' she thought, with a certain bitterness. 'My husband would tell me, if I cared for such an old thing, to send some painter from Munich to do it for me; and perhaps he would be right. It is the only mission we have, to spend money.'

It is a mission that most women think the highest and most blest on earth, but it did not satisfy Vere. She seemed to herself so useless, so stupidly, vapidly, frivolously useless; and her nature was one to want work, and noble work.

She sat still, with her hands resting on her knees, and the colour and oils lying on the stone floor beside her untouched. She looked at the dark bent figure of the old peasant near, who had set a little candle before a side altar, and was praying fervently. She was a grey-headed, brown, wrinkled creature, dressed in the old Styrian way, she looked rapt and peaceful as she prayed. When she rose Vere spoke to her, and the old woman answered willingly. Yes, she was very old; yes, she had always dwelt in Aussee; her husband had

worked in the salt mines and been killed in them; her sons had both died, one at Koniggratz, one in a snowstorm upon Dachstein, that was all long ago; she had some grandchildren, they were in the mines and on the timber rafts; one had broken his leg going down the Danube with wood; she had gone to him, he was only a boy; she could not get him home any other way, so she had rowed him back in a little flat boat, rowed and steered herself; it was winter, the Traun flood was strong, but they had come home safe; now he was well again, but he had seen the soldiers in Vienna, and a soldier he would be; there was no keeping him any more on the timber rafts. Vienna was very fine; yes, but herself she thought Aussee was finer; she had lighted that taper for her boy Ulrich; he was going to the army to-morrow; she had begged the saints to watch over him; the saints would let her see them all again one day. Had she much to live on? No; the young men gave her what they could, and she spun and knitted, and life was cheap at Aussee, and then one could always pray, that was so much,

and the saints did answer, not always, of course, because there were so many people speaking to them all at once, but yet often; God was good.

Vere took her by the hand, the rough gnarled hand like a bit of old oak bough, that had rowed the boat all the way from Vienna; and, having no money with her, slipped into it some gold *porte-bonheurs* off her wrist.

'If I stay I will come and see you. Tell me the way to find your house.'

'I shall never see you again,' said the old woman with swimming eyes. 'One does not see Our Lady twice face to face till one gets up to heaven.' And she went away wondering, feeling the gold circlets on her arm, and telling her gossips, as they knitted in the street, that she had seen either Our Lady or St. Elizabeth —one of the two it must surely have been.

When she had gone leaving her little taper, like a glow-worm, behind her, Vere still sat on, forgetful of the gay people who were carrying their coquetries, their jealousies, and their charms, on to the Traun water. She had everything that in the world's esteem is worth

having; the poor, looking at her, envied her, as one of those who walk on velvet, and never feel the stones. She had youth, she had beauty, she had a great position; yet, as she sat there, she herself envied the life of the poor. It was real; it was in earnest; it had the affections to sustain and solace it. What a noble figure that woman, rowing her sick boy down the river in the autumn rains, looked to her beside her own mother! Unconsciously she stretched out her arms into the vacant air; those slender beautiful white arms, that Paris said were sculpturally faultless, and that her husband liked to see bare to the shoulder at her balls, with a circle of diamonds clasping them; she felt they would have force in them to row through the rains and against the flood, if the boat bore a freight that she loved.

But love was impossible for her.

At the outset of her life the world had given her all things except that one.

They had shut her in a golden cage; what matter if the bird starved within? It would be the bird's ingratitude to fate.

Even if her offspring lived—she shuddered as she thought of it—they would be his, they would have his passions and his cruelties; they would be taken away from her, reared in creeds and in ways alien to her, they would be Zouroff Princes whose baby tyrannies would find a hundred sycophants, not her little simple children to lead in her own hand up to God.

As she sat there the sound of the organ arose, and rolled softly through the church. It was a time-worn instrument, and of little volume and power, but the rise and fall of the notes sounded solemn and beautiful in this old mountain church. The player was playing the Requiem of Mozart.

When the last chords thrilled away into silence, of that triumph of a mortal over the summons of death, a voice rose alone and sang the *Minuit Chrétien* of Adam.

She started and looked round into the gloom of the grey church. She saw no one; but the voice was that of Corrèze.

Then she sat motionless, following the beauty of the Noël as it rose higher and higher,

as though angels were bearing the singer of it away from earth, as the angels of Orcagna bear on their wings the disembodied souls.

For awhile the church was filled with the glory of rejoicing, with the rapture of the earth made the cradle of God—then all at once there was silence. His voice had not seemed to cease, but rather to float farther and farther above until it reached the clouds, and grew still from the fulness of an unimaginable joy, of an unutterable desire fulfilled. One or two minor chords of the organ, faint as sighs, followed, then they too were still.

Vere sat motionless.

Surprise, wonder, curiosity, were far away from her; all minor emotions were lost in that infinite sense of consolation and of immortality; even of him who sang she ceased for the moment to have any memory.

After a little while a lad came to her over the grey stones; a lad of Aussee, flaxen-haired and blue-eyed, in the white shirt that served him as a chorister.

He brought her a great bouquet of Alpine

roses, and in the midst of the roses was the rare dark-blue *Wolfinia Carinthiana* which grows upon the slopes of the Gartnerkögel, and nowhere else in all the world they say.

'The foreigner for whom I blew the organ-bellows bade me bring you this,' said the boy. 'He sends you his homage.'

'Is he in the church?'

'Yes; he says—may he see you one moment?'

'Yes.'

Vere took the Alpine bouquet in her hands. She was still in a sort of trance.

The Noël was still upon her ears.

She did not even wonder how or why he came there. Since she had heard the song of Heine, it seemed to her so natural to hear his voice.

She took her great bouquet in her hands and went slowly through the twilight of the church and towards the open doors. She was thinking of the little dog-rose gathered on the cliffs by the sea in Calvados.

In another moment Corrèze stood before

her in the dusk. A stray sunbeam wandering through the dusty panes of the window fell on his bright uncovered head.

'I thought you were far away,' she said, with effort—her heart was beating. 'I thought you were at the Hague?'

He made a little gesture with his hand.

'I shall be there. But could you think I would leave Austria so abruptly when you were in it? Surely not!'

She was silent.

In his presence, with the sweetness of his voice on her ear, all her old pure and perfect faith in him was strong as in the childish hour when she had heard him call the lark his little brother.

'You wrote to Madame de Sonnaz ——'

'I wrote to Madame de Sonnaz many things that I knew she would not believe,' he rejoined quickly. 'Oh, my Princess of Faith! one must fight the spirits of this world with worldly weapons, or be worsted. You are too true for that. Alas! how will the battle go with you in the end!'

He sighed impatiently. Vere was silent.

She but partly understood him.

'Have you been amongst the glaciers all this time?' she asked at length.

'No. I went to the Gitschthal in Carinthia. Do you know that yonder blue flower only grows there on the side of the Gartnerkögel, and nowhere else in all the breadth of Europe? I thought it was a fitter emblem for you than the edelweiss, which is bought and sold in every Alpine village. So I thought I would go and fetch it and bring it to you. The Gitschthal is very charming; it is quite lonely, and untrodden except by its own mountaineers. You would care for it. It made me a boy again.'

'You went only for that?'

'Only for that. What can one give you? You have everything. Prince Zouroff bought you the roc's egg, but I think he would not care to climb for the Wolfinea. It is only a mountain flower.'

Vere was silent.

It was only a mountain flower; but, as he

spoke of it, he gave it the meaning of the flower of Oberon.

Had she any right to hear him? The dusky shadows of the church seemed to swim before her sight; the beauty of the Noël seemed still to echo on her ear.

'How could you tell that I was here?' she murmured.

He smiled.

'That was very easy. I was in Ischl at daybreak. I would have sung a *réveil* under your window while the east was red, only Madame Jeanne would have taken it to herself. You go to Russia?'

'In three days—yes.'

Corrèze was silent.

A slight shudder passed over him, as if the cold of Russia touched him.

Suddenly he dropped on his knee before her.

'I am but a singer of songs,' he murmured. 'But I honour you as greater and graver men cannot do perhaps. More than I do, none can. They will speak idly of me to you, I dare say, and evil too, perhaps; but do not listen, do not

believe. If you ever need a servant—or an avenger—call me. If I be living I will come. Alas! alas! Not I, nor any man, can save the ermine from the moths, the soul from the world; but you are in God's hands if God there be above us. Farewell.'

Then he kissed the hem of her skirts and left her.

She kept the mountain flowers in her hand, and knew how her doubt had wronged him.

Ten minutes later she left the church, hearing the voices of her friends. At the entrance she was met by Madame de Sonnaz, whose high silver heels, and tall ebony cane, and skirts of cardinal red, were followed by an amazed group of Styrian children and women with their distaffs.

'Where have you been, my very dear?' asked Duchesse Jeanne. 'We have missed you for hours. We have been on the river, and we are very hungry. I am dying for a quail and a peach. What is that dark blue flower; does that grow in the church?'

A grey-headed English ambassador, Lord

Bangor, who was in the rear of the duchesse, and was a keen and learned botanist, bent his eye-glasses on the rare blue blossom.

'The Wolfinia!' he cried in delighted wonder. 'The *Wolfinia Carinthiana*; that is the very phœnix of all flowers! Oh, Princess! if it be not too intrusive, may one beg to know wherever you got that treasure? Its only home is leagues away on the Gitschthal.'

'It came from the Gitschthal; a boy brought it to me,' answered Vere; yet, though the words were literally true, she felt herself colour as she spoke them, because she did not say quite all the truth.

Duchesse Jeanne looked at her quickly, and thought to herself, 'Corrèze sent her those wild flowers, or brought them to her. I do not believe in La Haye.'

Vere, indifferent to them all, stood in the church porch, with the soft grey light shed on her, and the alpine roses in her hands, and the spell of the Noël was still with her. 'Lift up my soul,' prays the Psalmist—nothing will ever answer that prayer as music does.

'What a beautiful creature she is;' said the old ambassador incautiously to the Duchesse Jeanne, as he looked at her, with that soft light from sunless skies upon her face.

The Duchesse Jeanne cordially assented. 'But,' she added with a smile, 'people say so because she is faultlessly made, face and form; they say so, and there is an end. It is like sculpture; people go mad about a bit of china, a length of lace, a little picture; but no one ever goes mad about marble. They praise—and pass.'

'Not always,' said the imprudent diplomatist, forgetful of diplomacy. 'I think no one would pass here if they saw the slightest encouragement or permission to linger.'

'But there is not the slightest. What I said—she is sculptural.'

'How happy is Zouroff!'

'Ah! Call no man happy till he is dead. Who knows if she will be always marble.'

'She will never be a woman of the period,' said the old man with some asperity. 'I think her portrait will never be sold in shops. So far she will for ever miss fame.'

'It is amusing to see oneself in shops,' said Madame de Sonnaz. 'Now and then I see a little crowd before mine; and the other day I heard a boy say—a boy who had a tray full of pipes on his head—"Tiens! Celle-ci; elle est joliment laide, mais elle est crâne, la petite; v'là!" That was at my portrait.'

'It is popularity, madame,' said the ambassador with a grave bow. 'The boy with the pipes knew his period.'

'And how much that is to know!' said the lady with vivacity. 'It is better to be the boy with the pipes than Pygmalion. To know your own times, and adapt yourself to them, is the secret of success in everything from governing to advertising. Now-a-days a statesman has no chance unless he is sensational; a musician none unless he is noisy; an artist none unless he is either diseased or gaudy; a government none unless it is feverish, startling and extravagant. It is the same with a woman. To be merely faultlessly beautiful is nothing, or next to nothing; you must know how to display it, how to provoke with it, how to tint it here,

and touch it there, and make it, in a word, what my boy with the pipes called me. I have not a good feature in my face, you know, and I have a skin like a yellow plum, that Piver can do nothing to redeem, and yet ninety-nine of the whole world of men will look at that perfect beauty of Princess Zouroff, praise her, and leave her to come to me. The boy with the pipes is a type of mankind, I assure you. Will you tell me, pray, why it is?'

'Excuse me, madame,' said the old man, with another low bow. 'To explain the choice of Paris is always a most painful dilemma; the goddesses are all so admirable——'

'No phrases. You are old enough to tell me the truth; or, if you like, I will tell it to you.'

'I should certainly prefer that.'

'Well——'

'Well?'

'I will tell you, then, in her own husband's words: *elle ne sait pas s'encanailler.*'

And the duchesse, with a cigarette in her mouth, laughed, and carried her cardinal red

skirts, and her musical silver heels, over the stones of Aussee to a raft on the river which the skill of her attendants had turned into a very pretty awning-shaded flower-decked barge, where their breakfast was spread in the soft grey air above the green water.

Such women as Duchesse Jeanne or Lady Dolly are never in the country; they take Paris and London with them wherever they go.

The old diplomatist sat silent through the gay and clamorous breakfast, looking often at Vere, beside whose plate lay the alpine roses, and in whose ruffled lace at her throat was the blue Wolfinia.

'Good God! what an age we live in!' he thought. 'In which a husband makes it a reproach to his wife that she does not understand how to attract other men! I do believe that we have sunk lower than the Romans of the empire; they did draw a line between the wife and the concubine. We don't draw any. Perhaps, after all, the Nihilists are right, and we deserve cutting down root and branch in our corruption. The disease wants the knife.'

He muttered something of his thoughts to his next neighbour, the young Prince Traoï.

The young man nodded, smiled, and answered, 'Duchesse Jeanne is quite right. Princess Vera is as beautiful as a Titian; but one gets tired of looking at a Titian that one knows will never come into the market. Or rather she is like a classic statue in one of the old patrician museums in Rome. You know nothing will ever get the statue into your collection; you admire and pass. The other day, at the Hotel Drouot, there was a tobacco-pot in Karl Theodor porcelain, that was disputed by half Europe, and went at a fabulous price; the woman we like resembles that tobacco-pot; it is exquisite, but it can be got at, and anybody's hand may go into it; and even in its beauty—for Karl Theodor *is* so beautiful—it is suggestive and redolent of a coarse pleasure.'

'All that is very well,' said Lord Bangor; 'but though it may explain the modern version of Paris's choice, it does not explain why in marriage——'

'Yes, it does,' said the younger man. 'The Roman noble does not care a straw for the statues that ennoble his vestibule; if he saw them once being disputed in the Rue Drouot he would quicken into an owner's appreciation. Believe me, the only modern passion that is really alive is envy. How should any man care for what is passively and undisputedly his? To please us a woman must be hung about with other men's desires, as a squaw with beads.'

'Then you, too, would wish your wife to *savoir s'encanailler?*'

'Not my own wife,' said the young man with a laugh. 'But then I belong to an old school, though I am young; Austrians all do.'

'Whilst Russians,' said the old man savagely, 'Russians are all Bussy Rabutins crossed with Timour Beg. By all, I mean of course the five or seven thousand of "personages" that are all one sees of any nation in society. The nation, I dare say, is well enough, for it has faith, if its faith takes many odd shapes, and it can be very patient.'

The Duchesse Jeanne called aloud to him that he must not talk politics at breakfast.

Then the breakfast came to an end, with many fruits and sweetmeats and Vienna dainties left to be scrambled for by the Aussee water-babies; and the driving party of Madame de Sonnaz began their homeward way over the Potschen-Joch. The old ambassador contrived to saunter to the carriages beside Vere.

'If I were a score of years younger, madame,' he said with a glance at the dark blue flower at her throat, 'I would beg you to make me your knight and give me the *Wolfinia* for my badge. It is the only flower you ought to wear, for it is the only one really emblematic of you; the edelweiss, that they call you after in Paris, is too easily found—and too chilly. Have you liked the day; has it tired you very much?'

'It takes a great deal to tire me physically,' said Vere. 'I am stronger than they think.'

'But mentally you tire soon, because the atmosphere you are in does not suit you; is it not so?'

'I suppose so. I do not care for the chatter of the salons amidst the mountains.'

'No—

Le vent qui vient à travers les montagnes
Me rendra fou—

is a fitter spirit in which to meet the glaciers face to face. I think people either have a love of the mountains that is a religion, that is unutterable, sacred, and intense; or else are quite indifferent to them—like our friends. I know a man in whom they remain a religion despite all the counter-influences of the very gayest of worlds and most intoxicating of lives. I do not know whether you ever met him—I mean the singer Corrèze.'

'Yes; I know him.'

'He is a very keen mountaineer; he has a passion for the heights, not that of the mere climber of so many thousand feet, but rather of the dweller on the hills, whom nature has made a poet too. I saw him first when he was a little lad in the hills above Sion. You know people always say that part of his story is not true, but

it is quite true. I am not aware why people who have not genius invariably think that people of genius lie; but they do so. I suppose Mediocrity cannot comprehend Imagination failing to avail itself of its resources! Three-and-twenty years ago, Princesse, I was already an old man, but more active than I am now. After a long and arduous season at my post I was allowing myself the luxury of an incognito tour, leaving my secretaries and servants at Geneva. No one enjoys the privacy and ease of such holidays like an old harness-worn public servant, and there is no harness heavier than diplomacy, though they do give it bells and feathers. One of those short—too short—summer days I had overwalked myself amongst the green Alps of the Valais, and had to rest at a considerable elevation, from which I was not very certain how I should get down again. It was an exquisite day; such days as only the mountains can give one, with that exhilarating tonic in the air that does worried nerves more good than all the physicians. Almost unconsciously I repeated aloud in the

fulness of my heart, with a boyishness that I ought perhaps to have been ashamed of, but was not, the Thalysia; you will know it, Princesse; I have heard that you are a student that would have charmed Roger Ascham. As I murmured it to myself I heard a voice take up the Idyl, and continue with the song of Lycidas: a pretty childish voice, that had laughter in it, laughter no doubt at my surprise. I turned and saw a little fellow with a herd of goats; he was a beautiful child about nine or ten years old. His Greek was quite pure. I was very astonished, and questioned him. He told me he was called Raphael de Corrèze. As it was near evening he offered me to go down with him to his father's hut, and I did so; and, as he trotted by my side, he told me that his father had taught him all he knew. He kept goats, he said, but he studied too. I was belated, and should have fared ill but for the hospitality of that mountain hut. I cannot tell you how greatly his father interested me. He was a scholar, and had all the look and bearing of a man of birth. He told me briefly how *his* father had taken to the moun-

tains when the revolution ruined the nobility of Savoy. He was then in feeble health; he was anxious for the future of his boy, who was all alive with genius, and mirth, and music, and sang to me, after the simple supper, in the sweetest boyish pipe that it has ever been my lot to hear. I left them my name, and begged them to use me as they chose; but I never heard anything from them after the bright morning walk, when the boy guided me down into the high road for Sion. I sent him some books and a silver flute from Geneva, but I never knew that he got them. My own busy life began again, and I am shocked to say that I forgot that hut in the Alps, though that tranquil homely interior was one of the prettiest pictures which life has ever shown me. Many years afterwards, in Berlin, one night after the opera, going on to the stage with some of the princes to congratulate a new singer, who had taken the world by storm, the singer looked hard at me for a moment and then smiled. "I have the silver flute still, Excellency," he said. "I do hope you had the note I wrote you, to thank you for it, to Geneva."

And then, of course, in that brilliant young tenor I knew my little goat-boy, who had quoted Theocritus, and wondered how I could have been so stupid as not to have remembered his name when I heard it in the public mouth. So I, for one, know that it is quite true that he is a mountaineer no less than he is an artist and a Marquis de Corrèze. They say he has been in Ischl; I wish I had known it, for I am always so glad to see him out of the whirl of cities, where both he and I, in our different ways, are too pressed for time to have much leisure for talk. He is a very charming companion, Corrèze. Forgive me, Princesse, for telling you such a long story. Prosiness is pardoned to age; and here are the carriages.'

Vere had listened with changing colour, all the dejection and indifference passing from her face, and a light of pleasure and surprise shining in her frank grave eyes.

'Do not apologise. You have interested me very much,' she said simply.

And the astute old man noticed that, as she

spoke, she unconsciously touched the blue mountain flower at her throat.

'Improbable as it seems,' he thought to himself; 'I would wager that it is Corrèze who gave her that Wolfinia. She is not as cold as they say. "*Elle ne sait pas s'encanailler.*" No; and she will never learn that modern science. But there are greater perils for great natures than the bath of mud, that they never will take though it is the fashion. The bath of mud breaks nothing, and mesdames come out of it when they like white as snow. But these people fall from the stars, and break everything as they fall, in them and under them. She is half marble still; she is not quite awake yet; but when she is—when she is, I would not wish to be Prince Sergius Zouroff!'

The party went homeward in the fresh mountain air, leaving the evening lights on Old Aussee lying amidst its many waters. Vere was very silent, her alpine roses lay in her lap, the *Minuit Chrétien* was on her ear. The sun had set when they descended into Ischl. Her

servants came to meet her, and said that her husband had arrived.

'*Quel preux chevalier de mari!*' cried the Duchesse Jeanne with her shrill laughter, that was like the clash of steel.

'*Quel preux chevalier de mari,*' repeated the Duchesse de Sonnaz to Prince Zouroff alone, as they stood on the balcony of the hotel after dinner.

He laughed as he leaned over the balustrade smoking.

'*Je l'ai toujours été, pour toi,*' he whispered.

The Duchesse de Sonnaz gave him a blow with her pretty fan, that Fantin had painted with some Loves playing blind-man's-buff.

Vere was inside the room; she was intent upon her lacework. The shaded light of a lamp fell on the proud, mournful calmness of her face. She wore black velvet with a high ruff of old Flemish lace; she looked like a picture by Chardin.

Prince Zouroff sauntered in from the balcony and approached his wife.

'Vera,' he said suddenly to her, 'they tell

me you are great friends with that singing fellow Corrèze. Is it true?'

Vere looked up from her lace-work.

'Who say so?'

'Oh—people. Is it true?'

'I have seen M. de Corrèze little, but I feel to know him well.'

She answered him the simple truth, as it seemed to be to herself.

'Ah!' said Prince Zouroff, 'then write and tell him to come to Svir. We must have some grand music for the Tsarewitch, and you can offer him five hundred more roubles a night than the Petersburg opera gives him; he can have his own suite of rooms, and his own table; I know those artists give themselves airs.'

Vere looked at him for a moment in astonishment, then felt herself grow cold and pale, with what emotion she scarcely knew.

'You had better let Anton write if you wish it,' she answered, after a little pause. Anton was his secretary. 'But M. de Corrèze would not come; he has many engagements; and I

believe he never goes to private houses unless he goes as a guest, and then, of course, there is no question of money.'

Zouroff was looking at her closely through his half-closed eyelids. He laughed.

'Nonsense. If an artist cannot be hired the world is coming to an end. They have no right to prejudices, those people; and, in point of fact, they only assume them to heighten the price. I prefer you should write yourself; you can give him any sum you like; but he shall come to Svir.'

Vere hesitated a moment, then said very calmly, 'It is not for me to write; Anton always does your business; let him do this.'

The forehead of Zouroff grew clouded with a heavy frown; she had never contradicted or disobeyed him before.

'I order you to write, madame,' he said sternly. 'There is an end.'

Vere rose, curtsied, and passed before him to a writing-table. There she wrote:

'Monsieur,—My husband desires me to beg

you to do us the honour of visiting us at Svir on the fifteenth of next month, when the Tsarewitch will have the condescension to be with us; I believe, however, that you will be unable to do us this gratification, as I think your time is already too fully occupied. All arrangements you may wish to make in the event of your acceding to his desire you will kindly communicate to M. Zouroff. I beg to assure you of my distinguished consideration.

'VERA, Princess ZOUROFF.'

She wrote rapidly, addressed the letter, and handed it to her husband.

'Pooh!' he said, as he read it, and tore it up. 'You write to the fellow as if he were a prince himself. You must not write to a singer in that fashion. Say we will pay him anything he choose. It is a *question d'argent*; there is no need for compliments and consideration.'

'You will pardon me, monsieur, I will not write with less courtesy than that.'

'You will write as I choose to dictate.'

'No.' She spoke very quietly, and took up her lace-work.

'You venture to disobey me?'

'I will not disobey any absolute command of yours, but I will not insult a great artist because you wish me to do so.'

There was a look of resolve and of contempt on her face that was new to him. She had always obeyed his caprices with a passive, mute patience that had made him believe her incapable of having will or judgment of her own. It was as strange to him as if a statue had spoken, or a flower had frowned. He stared at her in surprise that was greater than his annoyance.

'*Pardieu!* what has come to you?' he said fiercely. 'Take up your pen and write what I have spoken.'

'*Napoléon, tu t'oublies!*' quoted the Duchesse Jeanne, as she came to the rescue with a laugh, 'My dear Prince, pardon me, but your charming wife is altogether in the right. Corrèze is a great artist; emperors kneel before him; it will never do to send for him as if he were an

organ-grinder, that is, at least, if you want him to come. Besides, Vera and he are old friends; they cannot be expected to deal with one another like *entrepreneur* and *employé*, in the sledge-hammer style of persuasion, which seems to be your idea of beguiling stars to shine for you. Believe me, your wife is right. Corrèze will never come to Svir at all unless——'

'Unless what?'

'Unless as her friend, and yours.'

There was a little accent on the first pronoun that cast the meaning of many words into those few monosyllables.

Zouroff watched his wife from under his heavy eyelids.

Vere sat still, and composed, taking up the various threads of her lace-pillows. She had said what she had thought courage and courtesy required her to say; to the effect of what she had said she was indifferent, and she did not perceive the meaning in the duchess's words —a pure conscience is often a cause of blindness and deafness that are perilous.

'When I have spoken——' began her

husband, for he had the childishness of the true tyrant in him.

Madame de Sonnaz puffed some cigarette-smoke into his face.

'Oh, Cæsar; when you have spoken, what then? You have no serfs now, even in Russia. You can have none of us knouted. You can only bow and yield to a woman's will, like any other man. *Voyons*! I will write to Corrèze. I have known him ever since he first set all Paris sighing as Edgardo, and I will insinuate to him gently that he will find a bouquet on his table each day with a million roubles about the stalks of it; that will be delicate enough perhaps to bring him. But do you really wish for him? That is what I doubt.'

'Why should you doubt it?' said the prince, with his sombre eyes still fastened on his wife.

Duchesse Jeanne looked at him and smiled; the smile said a great many things.

'Because it will cost a great deal,' she said demurely, 'and I never knew that the Tsarewitch cared especially for music. He is not Louis of Bavaria.'

Then she sat down and wrote a very pretty letter of invitation and cajolery and command, all combined. Vere never spoke; her husband paced up and down the room, angry at having been worsted, yet reluctant to oppose his friend Jeanne.

It was the first disobedience of Vere's since she had sworn him obedience at the altar. It gave him a strange sensation, half of rage, half of respect; but the mingling of respect only served to heighten and strengthen the rage. He had been a youth when the emancipation was given by Alexander to his people; and in his boyhood he had seen his servants and his villagers flogged, beaten with rods, driven out into the snow at midnight, turned adrift into the woods to meet the wolves, treated anyhow, as whim or temper dictated on the impulse of a moment's wrath. The instinct of dominion remained strong in him; it always seemed to him that a blow was the right answer to any restive creature, whether dog or horse, man or woman. He had seen women scourged very often, and going in droves from Poland to

Siberia. He could have found it in his heart to throw his wife on her knees and strike her now. Only he was a man of the world and knew what the world thought of such violence as that; and, in his own coarse way, he was a gentleman.

Corrèze received the letter of Duchesse Jeanne one evening on the low sands of Schevening, where some of the noblest ladies of northern nobilities were spoiling and praising him, as women had done from the day of his debût. Corrèze felt that he ought to have been content; he was seated luxuriously in one of the straw hive-like chairs, a lovely Prussian Fürstinn had lent him her huge fan, a Dutchwoman, handsome as Rubens' wife, was making him a cigarette, and a Danish ambassadress was reading him a poem of François Coppée; the sea was rolling in, in big billows, and sending into the air a delicious crisp freshness and buoyancy; all along the flat and yellow dunes were pleasant people, clever people, handsome people, distinguished people.

He ought to have been content. But he

was not. He was thinking of green, cool, dusky, fir-scented Ischl.

The Danish beauty stopped suddenly in her reading. 'You are not listening, Corrèze!' she cried aloud in some dismay and discomfiture.

'Madame,' said Corrèze gallantly, 'Coppée is a charming poet, but I would defy anyone to think of what he writes when it is you who are the reader of it!'

'That is very pretty,' said the lovely Dane; 'it would be perfect indeed; only one sees that you suppress a yawn as you say it!'

'I never yawned, or wished to yawn, in my life,' said he promptly. 'I cannot understand people who do. Cut your throat, blow out your brains, drown yourself, any one of these—that is a conceivable impulse; but yawn! what a confession of internal nothingness! What a vapid and vacant windbag must be the man who collapses into a yawn!'

'Nevertheless, you were very near one then,' said the Danish beauty, casting her Coppée aside

on the sand. 'Compliments aside, you are changed, do you know? You are serious, you are preoccupied.'

At that moment his secretary brought him his letters. His ladies gave him permission to glance at them, for some were marked urgent. Amongst them was the letter of Madame de Sonnaz.

He read it with surprise and some anger. It was a temptation; and the writer had known very well that it was so.

He would not have touched the roubles of the master of Svir, and would not willingly even have broken his bread, yet he would have given everything he possessed to go, to be under the same roof with the wife of Zouroff; to see, to hear, to charm, to influence her; to sing his songs for her ear alone.

The rough grey northern ocean came booming over the sands. Corrèze sat silent and with a shadow on his face.

Then he rose, wrote a line in a leaf of his notebook, gave it to his secretary to have

telegraphed at once to Ischl. The line said merely:

'Mille remerciments. Très honoré. Impossible d'accepter à cause d'engagements. Tous mes hommages.'

The sea rolled in with a grand sound, like a chant on a great organ.

'It is very *bourgeois* to do right,' thought Corrèze; 'but one must do it sometimes. Madame Jeanne is too quick; she plays her cards coarsely. All those Second Empire women are conspirators, but they conspire too hurriedly to succeed. My beautiful edelweiss, do they think I should pluck you from your heights? Oh! the Goths! Madame,' he said aloud, 'do be merciful, and read me the harmonies of Coppée again. You will not? That is revengeful. Perhaps I did not attend enough to his charming verses. There is another verse running in my head. Do you know it? I think Sully Prudhomme wrote it. It is one of those things so true that they hurt one; and one carries the burden of them about like a sad memory.

'Dans les verres épais du cabaret brutal,
Le vin bleu coule à flots, et sans trève à la ronde.
Dans le calice fin plus rarement abonde
Un vin dont la clarté soit digne du cristal.

Enfin, la coupe d'or du haut d'un piédestal
Attend, vide toujours, bien que large et profonde,
Un cru dont la noblesse à la sienne réponde :
On tremble d'en souiller l'ouvrage et le métal.'

'Have your letters made you think of that poem?' asked his companion.

'Yes.'

'And where is the golden cup?'

'At the banquet of a debauchee who prefers

"Les verres épais du cabaret brutal."'

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

LONDON : PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET